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Writing the Popular Song

BY

E. M. WICKES

AUTHOR OF

"HE LAID AWAY A SUIT OF GRAY"

"EVERY DOLLAR CARRIES TROUBLE OF ITS OWN," ETC., ETC.

INTRODUCTION BY

HARRY VON TILZER

COMPOSER OF

"MY OLD NEW HAMPSHIRE HOME," "I'D LEAVE MY HAPPY HOME FOR YOU," "SUMMERTIME," "LAST NIGHT WAS THE END OF THE WORLD," ETC,, ETC.

THE WRITER'S LIBRARY

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Author's Foreword

The author's aim in writing this book is to sweep aside any erroneous impressions that the reader may hold relative to the writing of popular songs; to point out to the beginner the numerous ways by which he is likely to handicap his work; to offer him helpful suggestions; to make him acquainted with the methods adopted by successful writers, and to show him how to approach the work in order to obtain the best results.

Among well-known song writers there is little that is secret pertaining to the general construction of a song, for approximately all of them apply the same fundamental principles. Occasionally, however, some writer will discover a novel device to please or to attract attention, but it will not remain his for long, as his contemporaries will soon learn of it and make it their own, provided his methods appeal to them. Years ago, for instance, Harry Von Tilzer saw the value of substituting an irregular meter in the old "coon" songs and introduced it in his "I Ain't Going to Weep no More." Before a month had passed a score of songs appeared, each having an irregular meter. Thus "rag time" was popularized.

Now the beginner, knowing little or nothing of the artifices utilized to make song writing profitable, follows his natural bent, which has a tendency to lead him astray. In time, however—should he be fortunate enough to come in contact with finished writers—he will discover that there is something more in a song than appears on the

surface; but to acquire, assimilate and apply this knowledge takes time, because those who have the art at their finger tips never think of imparting it to the tyro—the beginner must learn from observation and analysis.

Twenty-five years ago there was no necessity for a book on popular-song writing, as the present type of popular song was unknown, and the revenue to be gained from writing was not very tempting. Song writing was not considered to be a profession, owing to the limited market and the lack of proper facilities for national exploitation. Most of the songs were written by popular comedians who restricted the use of them to public performances. The actor-authors sang them into local popularity and created a small demand, and the publishers never dreamed of trying to increase the profits by interesting the entire country, as would have been beneficial to both author and publisher.

In those days a comedian wrote a song because he needed new material, and he wrote in a vein that he thought would appeal to his audience. A non-performer composed one because he could not prevent the sentiment from bubbling from his heart, and if he found a publisher willing to pay him twenty-five dollars for his product he considered himself fortunate. The publisher put the song on the market and charged performers from twenty-five to fifty cents a copy, and sold the regular sheet music to the public for so much as seventy-five cents a copy. Very often the publisher received from performers more than enough to pay for the cost of publication.

As time passed, however, performers were asked to pay

less and less, and today they never think of buying their copies. Indeed conditions have been reversed, and the big publishers now pay certain approved performers from five to fifty dollars a week to sing and popularize songs.

The songs of twenty-five years ago were very much alike in theme and construction. When the public found a pleasing song, it hummed, sang, and whistled it for months, instead of learning and forgetting it in a few weeks as it does at the present day.

The new style of popular song came into vogue about the time that the World's Fair at Chicago was opened, in 1893. Eastern publishers saw in it an opportunity for exploitation, knowing that many thousands would be there in search of amusement and ready to spend money.

Harry Dacre practically started the ball rolling with his "Daisy Bell." Before this song had outlived its usefulness, "After the Ball" appeared and became a big "hit." It was in 1893 that Edward B. Marks and Joseph W. Stern wrote and published "A Little Lost Child," which also attained wide popularity.

One may feel safe in asserting that the creators of the songs mentioned in the preceding paragraph made no attempt to study the likes and dislikes of the masses or their poetical and musical conceptions. Each author had a story to tell and told it in accordance with his own views of expression. Repetition of words, faulty rhymes, length, open vowels, concentration of theme, and "punch," did not concern the writers so much as did the story-idea and the simple melody. The writers who entered the profes-

sion later gradually learned that they could embellish a song by artifice.

Today the wise publisher, instead of issuing a song and of trusting to luck for success, very often invests hundreds of dollars in "trying it out on the public," and if the public does not take to it after a fair trial, the song is shelved. The writers, too, aim to make songs dovetail with existing conditions in preference to writing at random. For instance, L. Wolfe Gilbert said that he wrote "Robt. E. Lee" as the result of having discovered that a certain element in the South derive a great deal of pleasure from waiting for the arrival of some particular steamboat, especially the "Robt. E. Lee." Here, he felt, was an opportunity to build a song around a phase of life that had already endeared itself to a part of the public. In writing the lyric he endeavored to have his story portray actual scenes. The song was introduced simultaneously in the North and the South, and although the South took to it from the start, the North would have none of it until a month later. One can scarcely say that the "Robt. E. Lee" saw the light of day as the result of inspiration. Mr. Gilbert sensed a chance to commercialize human sentiment and took advantage of it.

Other forms of writing are based upon certain laws from which the author is not permitted to deviate without bringing down upon his head ridicule and condemnation, but the principles that to a certain extent govern the hand of the song writer are too flexible to be accepted as permanent laws. They are simply guide posts to the heart and the pocket of the public, subject to partial metamorphosis

or absolute elimination should others of greater practicality appear. The lyrist and the composer write to please the public, and while their finished product overlaps certain arts governed by rigid rules, they disregard and violate these rules when their transgressions promise to enhance the commercial value of their work.

The men and women who have won wealth and fame as song writers have done so only after years of careful study, experience, and disappointments. Behind them they have left helping hints for your benefit, and if you would emulate them you would do well to follow in their footsteps. Success awaits you at the end of the journey, provided Nature has seen fit to select you as a song bird and so has endowed you with the proper equipment. Before you start, however, make certain that you have been called, and are not calling yourself.

E. M. Wickes.

New York,
July 1, 1916.

Introduction

By Harry Von Tilzer

A popular song appears to be such a simple piece of work, or art, and its ingredients so seemingly obvious, that it does not strike one as being a fit subject for a book; and yet, the numerous ramifications set forth and explained in this volume are a flat contradiction to the conception held by the average person. A song looms up as the result of a momentary inspiration—finished, one might say, almost at its very inception, complete and ready for the public to sing, without any artifice necessary on the part of the author. Hence its apparent simplicity deludes thousands into believing that any one with a modicum of intelligence and a desire to become famous can dash off a successful song at will.

In olden times, perhaps, when the bards sang to please themselves, sang because their hearts insisted upon releasing pent-up emotions, artifice and trickery were unknown. In those days, however, the song makers did not have to concern themselves with the likes and dislikes of the public, and they gave no thought to fame or finance, their sole reward being the knowledge that others loved their songs.

In the distant past the writing of songs was play, a relaxation from daily cares, but today it is a business and demands businesslike methods. A song writer may still sing to suit his own tastes, provided they harmonize with those of his fellow men. His work has become a commodity

with a cash value, and in order to augment the value he must subordinate his own personal tastes to those of the music-buying public.

The sagacious and analytical song writer sees his public in a certain number of groups. Experience has taught him that one group likes sweet rustic sentiment, a second romance and humor combined, a third maudlin sentiment, a fourth philosophy, and so on. The emotion which pleases each group, he realizes, is the preferred one for the time, but he also realizes that any group, or part of a group, may migrate emotionally for a time and upset his calculations. Therefore, instead of trying to keep track of such deviations he aims to appeal to some paramount emotion, feeling confident that what he loses in one he will find in another group. Consciously or unconsciously, he accepts the theory that nothing is destroyed, and that his success will depend upon his ability to put his lute in tune with some dominant emotion in mankind.

In the long run he aims to please all groups, but he is too wise to think he can do so at any one time. In his efforts to please he studies those about him, as well as the things in life that make an impression. Having become familiar with the things that please, he learns the art of blending them in their most attractive form, and in so doing he gradually acquires the knack or art of writing popular songs. This art becomes part of him, although he may not be competent to dissect it for the benefit of others.

The ability to write heart-interest songs is a gift endowed by Nature. You cannot woo it, pilfer it, or manufacture it. Within your soul it may remain dormant for years.

Nature has breathed it into your soul and expects you to develop it. You are called upon to sing just so many songs for the world, and when you have finished your task you must step aside and make room for another. You may have been chosen to sing one or a hundred songs; no one can tell, until you have sought in vain for the muse that once came so readily to your call.

Actuated by envy or greed for gold, you may convince yourself that you were born to sing for your fellow men, and you may string together phrases and notes that please you and your friends, but unless Nature has seen fit to select you as a singer, you will find the world deaf and indifferent to your compositions.

However, you cannot tell whether you were intended for a song writer until after you have given yourself a thorough test. If you do not possess latent talent a book of instructions will be of little value; but if you are one of the favored ones, you will do well to study the ways and means employed by those who have already arrived.

The man aspiring to become a popular-song writer today has a great deal less to contend with than did the pioneers. They had no book from which to learn. They plodded along in the dark, leaving behind them footprints for others to follow. The pioneers never stopped to analyze their experiences. Instinctively they assimilated the good and discarded the bad. And as in other walks of life, the task of removing obstacles, the selection of proper equipment, and the marking of the shortest cut to success, were all left to the analytical mind destined to follow.

Success in song writing comes from hard work, persist-

ency, plus natural ability. Every man who has reached the top of the ladder has winced as he bumped his shins against the rungs of disappointment. Not even natural-born song writers are immune from such slips. They know how to climb in a fashion of their own, but they do it in such a crude manner that no one will pay to see them. After all, instruction helps even those who are gifted.

A beginner may be endowed with splendid ideas in the rough, but he must learn how to smooth away the ragged edges of his work before he can expect consideration, and this takes time and practice. For several years I collaborated with Vincent Bryan, one of the most prolific lyric writers of the day, but before I could derive any real value from his work I had to write more than thirty songs with him, always coaching him to my way of thinking.

Mr. Bryan had his own views as to how a song should be constructed, and there are scores of possible writers in the same position today, whom neither I nor any other active writer can afford the time to train. The only alternative for them, then, is a book—a book that offers accurate information pertaining to all the phases of song writing, written by some one who has been through the actual grind.

Much of the data in this book would have been a great help to me in the beginning of my career. For instance, I did not know that a song should be confined to an octave so as to meet the range of the average voice. I did not realize that songs should be aimed primarily at the hearts of women, especially the young generation; neither did I realize that I would never produce a hit unless I touched

a common chord in the hearts of my fellow beings. Various other points, all plain to me now, were foreign then. I wrote as I felt and trusted to luck.

A song to me and my contemporaries was something that defied analysis. We saw it only in its entirety. If the public took to one of our songs, we were happy, and for a time we believed that we could produce a hit at will —that the public had taken to our style and always would. But as time passed we discovered that we would have to write as the public desired, and this compelled us to study the likes and dislikes of the people who buy popular sheet music.

Knowing the great help that this book can be to the beginner, I find a great deal of pleasure in writing this introductory article, for I sincerely believe that "Writing the Popular Song" will be of inestimable value to the man or the woman willing to work conscientiously, and able to profit by the successes and failures of those who have preceded him.

HARRY VON TILZER.

New York,
July 15, 1916.

WRITING THE POPULAR SONG

CHAPTER I

THE POPULAR SONG

1. The Old-Time Song and the New

Popular songs are intended to amuse and entertain us during hours of relaxation from business and domestic cares, but not infrequently they have the opposite effect--they make us sad and pensive. Nevertheless, in making some hearers sad, a song often accomplishes a great deal of good, for wanderers from "the straight and narrow path" sometimes take a turn for the better after having heard a sad song that applied to their own lives. A girl who has lost her sweetheart may find a melancholy pleasure in the painful recollections that are brought back to her from hearing a song dealing with a case similiar to her own, and strange to say, she is likely to purchase a copy of the song in order to live the whole affair over and over again. Another person will prefer a humorous song in times of depressed spirits. So likes and moods differ, and the song writer tries to supply a variety that will meet all demands.

The old school of song writers, like Foster and Stewart, sang of simple things, mostly of the heart and the hearth, leaving to the world such widely popular ballads as "Gentle Annie," "My Old Kentucky Home," "Darling Nellie Gray," and "The Cricket on the Hearth." Sex problems, gilded vice, and various other phases of the life of today had little or no place in their song perspective.

Patriotism came in for its share of attention but a patriotic song in those days was a thing inspired, and not a story entwined with the American flag from commercial motives. In justice to the song writer of the present time it should be said that no writer can make profit from the use of the flag unless the public sees fit to permit him to do so. The public revels in songs of this nature, and as the song writer must eat, and very often see that a few others eat, he has no alternative but to furnish the public with what it desires. Simple songs still appeal to the public, but it tires of them more quickly than it did thirty or forty years ago.

2. The Public and the Song Writer

The public seldom becomes interested in any particular song writer, as it does in a fiction writer, a dramatist, or an inventor, and the best that a successful song writer may hope for is a financial reward, and a modicum of admiration in a circumscribed set. The popular-song writer quickly follows his own creations into oblivion. Once in a great while a man writes a classic that is taken up by the masses, and he and his work live in the memory of mankind long after he is dead. Ethelbert Nevin accomplished this with his high-class song, "The Rosary."

"The Raven" was sufficient to make Poe's name immortal, although his compensation in money was nothing when compared with that received by popular-song writers for verse of a much shorter length. Poe is said to have been paid fifteen dollars for his poem, whereas Irving

Berlin probably collected close to forty thousand dollars for "Alexander's Ragtime Band." But money is not everything in life, at least not to Mr. Berlin's way of thinking, for he is credited with having said that he would rather have written four lines of "The Raven" than all his hits combined. Mr. Berlin possesses a soul, though few persons appear to be generous enough to admit that he does.

So we see that the music-buying public is perfectly willing to shower gold on the clever song writer, while it reserves no niche for him in the hall of fame. The successful song writer is the highest-paid and the least-thought-of writer in existence. Ballard MacDonald spent about two hours on the lyric of "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine," which contains just one hundred and fifty words. He is said to have received ten thousand dollars for his share, or $666.67 a word. Compare this amount with the sum given to Milton for "Paradise Lost," and later when you have some spare time try to reason out why such a condition should exist.

3. The Public and the Song

The public purchases whatever appeals to it, regardless of the intrinsic value of a song. Very often it expends thousands of dollars for inane doggerel, but it would not part with the dimes unless beneath that doggerel there lay a spark capable of kindling some human emotion. Just how to incorporate that spark in a song is difficult to say. When writers feel positive that they have captured the elusive thing they suddenly discover that they have

missed it by a league. The popular song has always been more or less of a conundrum. Psychologists have subjected it to a process of disintegration in the hope of discovering the source of its influence over the public mind, but they have not made much headway.

The popular song, good or bad, differs from every other form of writing. Once a person is attracted to a song, he is not satisfied until he has memorized at least part of it, in order to be able to sing, hum or whistle it day in and day out for a certain length of time. While he may not care to see a great play more than once—or perhaps two or three times—he will gladly listen to his favorite song a hundred times, yes, a thousand.

A young woman after having taken a fancy to a song will wake up with it on her lips, she will sing it at work, and very often go to bed humming the chorus to herself. Then when another that appeals to her comes out, she will immediately discard the old one like a worn slipper. For if you hope to keep in her good graces you must supply her with variety. If she is in love with a rustic ballad today she will not be likely to care for the same type next month.

This shifting of fancies is what causes worry for the song writer. He aims to secure a pleasing change for the girl singer. Sometimes he hits the mark, but more often he does not. All writers are trying to keep abreast of her fickle moods. Once a man has caught her fancy with a song the trick appears to be a simple one, but when he makes another attempt he finds that it is just as difficult as ever. If one could predict just what the musical public will take from month to month he would soon be listed

with Carnegie and Vanderbilt. In the vain attempt to do so, fortunes are swept away, while the little girl who makes the popular song industry a gold mine for some, goes on her way blithely, singing to herself as if nothing ever happened. Just why she will go into raptures over a maudlin ditty and turn her nose up at something of real value, who knows! Perhaps it is she and not the song that should be analyzed by the psychologists.

CHAPTER II

VARIOUS TYPES OF SONGS ANALYZED

For the sake of a convenient order, popular songs may be divided into *Ballads*, including the Semi-high-class, March, Rustic, Irish, Descriptive, and Mother; and *Novelty Songs*, including Flirting, Juvenile, Philosophical, Comic, Irish, Production, Stage, Suggestive, and Rag-time. Of course, these types often overlap.

The publishers of popular songs seldom attempt to do anything with high-class numbers, as they depend upon vaudeville, burlesque shows, cabarets, and moving-picture houses as mediums to exploit their wares, and the patrons of these places are not supposed to possess much relish for really classical music.

1. The High-Class Song

On the other hand, publishers of high-class songs keep clear of the popular brand. They have no desire to mingle with the rank and file of the vaudeville world, and they do not retain song "pluggers" nor a set of professional rooms. Occasionally a song from a high-class house, like "The Rosary," or "A Perfect Day," will become a favorite with the masses, and in such cases most public performers have to buy a copy, while the public has to pay from twenty-five to fifty cents apiece. The Five and Ten Cent Stores cannot afford to handle such songs, although more

than once the big syndicates have lost money on a hit of this sort in order to draw customers.

There is a fairly good market for high-class ballads, but "popular" writers pay no heed to it, for two reasons: Some are not capable of producing high-class songs, and those who are, do not consider the financial rewards attractive enough.

The "popular" publisher cares for nothing that is not original, whereas the high-class firm often secures the rights to the work of a well-known poet and has some of his poems set to music by a musical celebrity, hoping that the poet's admirers of a musical trend will also purchase the songs. The composer receives a lump sum for the work, or a royalty. The publisher feels confident that the intrinsic merit of the songs will sell enough copies to pay him for his investment, and besides, he can keep them on sale for years. The "popular" publisher has to concentrate his money and attention on one or two numbers and create a demand for them within a reasonable time or shelve them for something else. Every few months he must have something new for performers in search of fresh material. Many of the high-class publishers conduct a retail business, and have a list of subscribers who buy a copy of each number they issue, excepting pieces intended for students. With one or two exceptions, the "popular" publishers keep to the wholesale end, finding an outlet for their products through the jobbers, the syndicates, and the department stores.

High-class songs lack the variety and concreteness so essential to the success of the popular brand, and every

year hundreds of the former appear without a chorus. As a rule the themes in high-class compositions deal with love, sad or glad, or some phase of nature—nature as the subject, and not merely the environment.

2. The Semi-High-Class Song

The semi-high-class song approximately always deals with love—love in a chaste form—and the writers strive to employ phrasing that will appeal to educated persons, as well as to the little factory girl. In order to accomplish this, writers have to confine themselves to simplicity and simple figures of speech. "Take Me Back to the Garden of Love," "All that I Ask Is Love," and "Sweet Adeline," the last-named by Dick Gerard, are excellent types of semi-high-class ballads for the new writer to study.

The semi-high-class song does not necessarily call for a specific or concrete setting. A word or a line about the stars or the twilight is sufficient to lead the hearer to picture in his own mind a setting. Sometimes the author does not refer to any particular thing, but just sings as if he were talking to his sweetheart, oblivious of his surroundings.

In semi-high-class ballads, real lyric writers endeavor to idealize a caress, and some writers refrain from introducing osculation in the story, as may be seen in the following lyric:

LAST NIGHT WAS THE END OF THE WORLD[1]

Words by ANDREW B. STERLING Music by HARRY VON TILZER

We were alone in the moonlight,
There in the shadow below;
Last night to me in my dreaming
Was thousands of years ago.
Sweet was the story I told you,
Sweet, but the end was a sigh,
You told me that you loved another,
Last night when you said, good-bye.

CHORUS

Last night the stars were all aglow,
Last night I loved, I loved you so;
My heart was glad for you were near,
I held your hand and called you dear, My Dear;
And then the stars grew dim and cold,
The moon grew pale, my heart grew old;
My dream is o'er, to live no more,
Last night was the end of the world.

Why did I call you my dear one?
There was a light in your eye.
Last night, dear, I thought it was beaming
For me, till I saw it die.
Why did you teach me to love you,
Why, when you knew we must part?
A smile, and you left me forever,
Last night when you broke my heart.

"Last Night Was the End of the World" sold more than a million copies. Why? The lyric depicts the old story of shattered hopes, told in a simple manner. There

[1] Copyright, MCMXII, by Harry Von Tilzer Publishing Co., 222 West 46th Street, New York.

is not the slightest semblance of a kiss, and yet it conveyed a world of emotion and sentiment to a million hearts. Mr. Sterling did not indicate the gender of the singer, which very likely added to the song's strength, making it possible for a man or a woman to picture himself or herself in the grieved one's place. There is not one line that would cause a schoolgirl to doubt the author's meaning. The song, as a result, is considered one of the best semi-high-class ballads issued during the past ten years.

The aspiring author will do well to note how Mr. Sterling plunged right into the heart of his story, using one word, *moonlight*, to establish a setting. He made no attempt to tell you what had preceded the *finale*, leaving all this to your imagination. The novice in handling this theme would very likely have described the girl's hair and eyes, and possibly told of the departure from the house and the trip down the lane.

The song is written in 12–8 time, which confines its use to the better class of singers. This time-scheme has a tendency to handicap the success of a song, as it places it beyond the singing ability of the ordinary vocalist, but some publishers prefer to have one "head-liner" like Fiske O'Hara feature a song than a hundred "cabaret shouters." The majority of semi-high-class songs are written in common, or 4–4, time, and the tyro will do better to hold to the latter until he has gained some actual experience.

3. *March Ballads*

A good, snappy march ballad with an interesting story

is one of the most profitable songs known to the music business. It may deal with practically any subject suitable for song purposes—love, humor, philosophy, war, or any other of wide appeal. The titles printed below will afford an idea as to the variety that may be injected into the march ballad form:

"The Tulip and the Rose"
"I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier"
"It's a Long Way to Tipperary"
"I'm on My Way to Mandalay"
"Good-by, Boys"
"In the Town Where I Was Born"

Most performers prefer a march ballad for opening or closing; burlesque shows have a fondness for this type; acrobatic and other "dumb acts" fancy the march, as it adds "ginger" to their work and keeps the audience in good humor; a march makes an excellent number for an overture, and is well-adapted for dancing and marching. The rhythm in a march ballad harmonizes with the natural rhythm in mankind.

An experienced writer on discovering a ballad theme does not begin work on it until he makes certain as to the type of ballad for which it is best suited. Some ideas are too draggy for a march, and others too snappy for a waltz. At times an idea is not suitable for singing purposes, and this necessitates reconstruction. There should be a musical lilt in the title (which embodies the idea) as well as in the rest of the song. Had Al. Bryan said, "I Don't Intend

My Boy to be a Soldier," he would have killed some of the lilt and weakened the general sentiment. In order to incorporate the proper lilt into his "The Tulip and the Rose" Jack Mahoney had to repeat: "When you wore a tulip, *a big yellow tulip*, and I wore a big red rose." The word *big*, which is perhaps unnecessary, was used to carry out the rhythm. What a difference it would have made had he said: "When you wore a tulip and I wore a rose." Try to sing the altered line in march time.

Good lines frequently suggest themselves to writers, but not always in a form that makes them available to fit in with the rhymes and rhythm of the rest of the song, and in such cases the lyrist is compelled to revise until he has just what he needs. Time and again poor and hackneyed lines come and are immediately rejected. The beginner contracts the habit of using the first thing that enters his mind, as he is more interested in sending his work to a publisher than he is in quality.

Many themes are equally suitable for either march or waltz ballads, and it is optional with the author as to which *tempo* he selects. However, when a composer writes the melody first, the lyrist has no alternative, but must follow the rhythm and meter of the melody. Just how one should handle a theme depends upon his own ability and the style of songs in vogue.

4. Rustic Ballads

The modern type of rustic ballad has undergone a number of changes since its advent into the popular song realm. About 1894 Sterling and Von Tilzer wrote "My

Old New Hampshire Home," which opened up a new field. Mr. Sterling utilized the story of a lover in the city dreaming of his country sweetheart who lay "sleeping" in the village churchyard. Then Braisted and Carter used the same theme in a different manner in "The Girl I loved in Sunny Tennessee." These two songs started a cycle of rustic ballads. Later on the writers omitted the dead sweetheart and pictured her as waiting for the lover in a cottage or a log cabin home. And when this idea became worn out they substituted retrospection—the old man singing to his faithful wife of the happy days they knew during their courtship.

There was very little variety in the early ballads. An eight-line stanza and a four-line chorus had first call. Middle-rhymes, in which a word in the middle of a line rhymes with one at the end, were more in evidence than any other form. Approximately all ballads of this style were written in waltz time. Today rustic ballads, with few exceptions, are written in march time, and the writers aim to introduce novelty in their meters and rhymes.

Rustic ballads like "My Old New Hampshire Home," "The Girl I Loved in Sunny Tennessee," "My Little Georgia Rose," "On the Banks of the Wabash," and "She Was Bred in Old Kentucky," have not been excelled, and the new writer will do well to study them for euphony, phrasing, condensation, and general construction. "Sunny Tennessee" is a very good example of a finished popular lyric.

A novice in handling a theme of this sort would be likely to weaken the sentiment by giving a detailed de-

scription of his setting, the girl's personal charms and her parents. Braisted told his story, furnishing bits of description as he went along.

THE GIRL I LOVED IN SUNNY TENNESSEE[1]

Words by HARRY BRAISTED Music by STANLEY CARTER

On a morning bright and clear to my old home I drew near,
Just a village down in sunny Tennessee;
I was speeding on a train that would bring me back again
To my sweetheart who was waiting there for me.
It was but a few short years since I kissed away her tears,
As I left her at my dear old mother's side,
And each day we've been apart, she's grown dearer to my heart,
Than the night I asked of her to be my bride.

CHORUS

We could hear those darkies singing as she said farewell to me,
Far across the fields of cotton my old homestead I could see.
When the moon rose in its glory then I told life's sweetest story
To the girl I loved in sunny Tennessee.

As the train drew up at last old familiar scenes I passed,
And I kissed my mother at the station door;
But as old friends gathered round, tears on every face I found,
And I missed the one that I'd been longing for.
As I whispered, "Mother dear, where is Mary, she's not here?"
All the world seemed lost and sadness came to me,
For she pointed to a spot in the little churchyard lot
Where my sweetheart sleeps in sunny Tennessee.

In the story Mr. Braisted evidently aimed to work up to a climax, withholding from the hearer until the last two lines the knowledge of the girl's death. Suspense in

[1] Copyright, 1899, by Jos. W. Stern & Co., New York.

a song is just as valuable as it is in a short-story, but the writer should be careful not to make it incongruous with the rest of his narrative or its sentiment.

The southern states are better fitted to be scenes for rustic ballads than states in other parts of the country. In the first place, the South has always been associated with romance and chivalry; and secondly, the names are more euphonious. Names like Oregon, Nebraska, Michigan, and Dakota suggest adventure, cold, and commerce. Several writers have managed to weave a little sentiment around the cowboy and his sweetheart, but this style of song has never found much favor with the public. Indiana scored once with "The Banks of the Wabash," and New Hampshire twice.

No experienced writer would ever think of using Massachusetts in a song title, and yet this state is just as picturesque and romantic as New Hampshire. The other states belonging to the New England group have never been given any consideration as song titles.

Five years ago some may have felt that the South had been exhausted as a source of ballad material, but "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine," "Kentucky Days," and "The Tulip and the Rose," proved that such was not the case, and so long as one can blend a pretty southern love story with a catchy melody he will always have a chance of producing a hit. The new writer, however, should be careful not to employ obsolete themes or forms of structure that are not in vogue. Perhaps later the rustic ballad will be written in slow time; then again, it may not. To know what system and style of theme to use is part of a

song writer's business, but he will not know unless he keeps himself informed of the changes continually taking place.

5. *Irish Ballads*

Irish ballads are a drug on the market, and the chances of making one popular are small indeed. In spite of this fact, few publishers can resist the temptation of trying to land a hit with one from time to time. The Shamrock, the Blarney Stone, Dublin, or some river, is invariably selected as a subject by the old and the new writers.

An Irish ballad must be exceptionally good to interest the mixed population of this country. While it is true that we have a large Irish element, it is also true that the majority of persons of native birth and foreign extraction of other countries are no more interested in Irish songs than they are in French or German songs.

Good Irish songs are written every year and receive thorough tests, but the public rarely takes to them. The real Irish ballad hits of the past ten years can be counted on one's fingers, and with the exception of one or two, they have been issued by the same firm. It is no easy task to popularize an Irish ballad, and to keep drumming it into the public's ears for months, sometimes years, costs a fortune in itself. A man like Chauncey Olcott or John McCormack can do a great deal towards winning favor for a ballad, but every publisher is not fortunate enough to have a celebrity of this kind to feature his Irish songs.

When an Irish ballad does warm its way into the heart of the public it remains there for years and becomes some-

what of a standard song, thereby eliminating the chances of another becoming popular. "The River Shannon," "Mother Machree," and one or two others, have been popular favorites for several years. They are as welcome today as they were when they were introduced.

To the beginner the Irish ballad offers very little hope, and he will make better use of his talents by concentrating his attention on something that has a wider appeal. When he has become experienced, and familiar with the market conditions, he may judge for himself.

6. Mother Songs

Mother songs have again forged to the front; but just how long they will occupy the spotlight of public attention it is impossible to say. Each day's mail brings stacks of mother songs to the big publishers, and not one out of a hundred is of any value. Most of the authors offer imitations, and those who do not, turn their thoughts to the hackneyed idea of a wandering boy soliloquizing about his forsaken parent.

The European war, Al. Bryan, and Leo Feist started the present cycle of mother songs, and up to the present writing, Bryan and Fischer, assisted by Leo Feist and E. F. Bitner, have turned out the best mother song on the market in "I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier." A peculiar feature about this song is that the title does not mention *mother*.

Every publisher who can afford the extravagance of a mother song has put one out, but few of them will even get

back the cost of publication, for the public is already tiring of the type.

Two or three mother songs are all the average girl cares to buy from a cycle, and with every staff writer grinding out one there is little chance for the newcomer to get a hearing. However, if a man believes that he has an extraordinary story he may as well offer it to the publishers. He will not lose anything by it, but he will increase his chances of success by turning to some other theme that the veteran writers have deserted for the time being. One secret of successful song writing is to catch the public mind with something novel just as it is becoming bored with another theme.

In normal times many publishers steer clear of mother songs, experience having proved to them that music buyers are more interested in the love affairs of John and Mary than in filial affection and domestic tranquility. However, when one publisher steals a march and lands a winner with a mother song, he arouses the envy and greed of his rivals, who are unable to sit still. Each must have his fling at mother.

7. *Descriptive Ballads*

While all ballads are of a more or less descriptive nature, the descriptive ballad proper is one in which the story is told in the third person. It may deal with love, pathos, patriotism, or any of several other themes. In descriptive ballads writers aim to incorporate a moral of some kind. The story itself should be strong, and the title tell or imply a definite story. "Take Back your Gold," "A Bird in a

Gilded Cage," "The Fatal Rose of Red," "The Story the Violets Told," "In The Baggage Coach Ahead," and "The Fatal Wedding," were some of the descriptive ballads that became hits during the cycle of descriptive ballads.

Children may also be utilized as themes for descriptive ballads, for "The House of too Much Trouble," "Down in The City of Sighs and Tears," and "Won't You Come Over to My House?," come under this heading.

During the past few years the public has seen very little of good descriptive ballads, and in lieu of something decent it took to several indecent ones. In view of this fact, one would be led to believe that there is a dearth of real descriptive writers, or else the publishers are so engrossed with tangoes and fox trots that they have forgotten the value of a good descriptive ballad.

Ballads of this sort that deal with children seldom carry more than four lines to the verse and to the chorus. The rhymes run in couplets, and the meter is regular. Description should apply to the characters, their actions and words, and not to the environment. In former years the tendency with writers was to employ a slow, draggy rhythm and meter. The lyric with adult characters may vary in length. If you can tell your story, and tell it well, in four lines, there is no reason why you should extend it—that is, the verse. Save your surplus sentiment and sobs for the chorus.

Here is a field that is still fertile for both new and old writers. Capital titles and ideas abound on all sides waiting for some clever mortal to turn them into golden nuggets.

8. Juvenile Songs

A juvenile song is often spoken of as a child song. Those that became popular have carried a pathetic little story dealing with children, and now and then the underlying ideas have offered much food for thought.

Juvenile songs may deal with white or with colored children. The best songs of this type were written either from the child's point of view, or from that of the author, with the latter depicting the heartaches and troubles of some foresaken little boy. An old trick of writers was to portray some rich boy longing to play with a crowd of happy urchins. Occasionally a lyrist developed a new twist and scored a hit like "I'm Tying the Leaves so They Won't Come Down," which is reminiscent of O. Henry's "Last Leaf."

Mere description of children at play does not constitute a child ballad. You must have a heart-interest story, one that will arouse sympathy for the child. In order to obtain this effect writers often show the child as being neglected by a mother more interested in social teas than in her offspring. When the child is about to join the angels, she suddenly realizes what she has been doing, but it is too late to make amends, and she is painted as a heart-broken woman sobbing over her dying baby. Crude as the method may be, a story of this sort is meant to teach a lesson to indifferent mothers and newly-married young women.

The general construction of a juvenile song is regular—short verses, short chorus, and both the verse and chorus rhymed in couplets, that is, in adjacent pairs.

For the past few years writers appear to have been so engrossed with ragtime and novelty songs that they have forgotten that there is a certain part of the public ever ready to respond to a good juvenile song. Perhaps some newcomer may be able to revive the type.

9. Novelty Songs

All live publishers welcome the sight of a real novelty song; all wise writers are constantly searching for novel ideas, fully aware of the fact that performers and the public will greet them with open arms.

An old theme may be made novel by fresh treatment, and a novelty song may deal with almost any secular subject under the sun. Ideas and phrases that are trite in other walks of life may be turned into song novelties. Hundreds of aspiring song writers have heard a newly-married man singing about his first born, and yet not one ever saw the possibilities for a novelty number until Irving Berlin did and secured a hit in "Somebody's Coming to my House." The same anxious tyros have seen scores of men get out of an automobile to make repairs, but the incident meant nothing to them. A trained mind watched this little performance one day and wrote "He Had to Get Out and Get Under."

"Good by, Boys" is another novelty number whose theme is anything but original. It is common to hear a prospective Benedict refer to his coming marriage as Andrew B. Sterling did in his story; but no song writer had ever presented the idea in the same manner, and Mr. Sterling obtained a novelty.

Subtle humor, or good-natured satire, is a valuable asset in a novelty, but ancient and obvious jokes should be omitted. Leave something to the imagination of the audience. Old puns are not absolutely barred, provided you can clothe them in new apparel. In "Good By, Boys," Mr. Sterling appears to be speaking in a regretful strain, and at the same time he is conveying satire and humor.

Before showing how he accomplished his aim, it may interest the reader to know how the idea for the song originated. Harry Von Tilzer, the man who wrote the melody, was about to start for Europe, and as the ship pulled out he waved his hand to some of his friends and said: "Good by, Boys!" He wrote to Mr. Sterling, mentioning the title and the idea, and when he returned Sterling had a lyric.

GOOD BY, BOYS[1]

Words by ANDREW B. STERLING and WILLIAM JEROME
Music by HARRY VON TILZER

Good by, old pals, I'm going far away,
'Tis duty calls and I must obey.
I know you'll weep when I am leaving,
A hero always leaves 'em grieving.
Good by, and give my love to Maud and Flo,
Tell all the girls I know,
Just like a soldier boy I plunged into the strife,
To battle for my life.

CHORUS

Good by, boys, I'm going to be married tomorrow,
Good by, boys, I'm going from sunshine to sorrow;
No more hanging around the town at night,

[1] Copyright, MCMXIII, By Harry Von Tilzer Co., New York.

No more staying out, 'till broad daylight,
I'm going to rehearse for better or for worse,
So good by, boys.

Good by, old pals, I'll bravely face the foe,
When she says *yes* I'll come right back with *no*!
If she should make a scene, oh,
I'll take the next train out to Reno.
Good by, if I'm alive and well next year,
I'll surely meet you here,
If not, remember I died fighting for my rights,
My rights to stay out nights.

This lyric carries two choruses, as there are some additional catch lines.

No more waiting at the old stage door
No more phoning from the old drug store;
Pauline and Juliet are names I must forget,
So Good by, Boys.

In order to introduce novelty in treatment the authors likened marriage to war, then spoke as a soldier boy might have done, and finally kept the audience in doubt until they reached the chorus. They had recourse to figurative language, but not one person in a thousand would be confused as to the real meaning. There would have been little or no punch to the entire lyric had the authors composed it in a plain, matter-of-fact way.

Having let the audience into the secret, the authors did not try to keep to the original method of saying one thing and meaning another. In the second verse one can almost see the author, or the character in the song, smiling as he talks to his friends.

In "He's a Devil," and "Somebody's Coming to My House," Irving Berlin made use of the same brand of humor, and William Jerome did likewise in "Rip Van Winkle Was a Lucky Man."

Novelty songs call for a lively swing. Some are written in 2-4 time, and others in a broken meter. Irving Berlin puts practically all of his novelty numbers in his own peculiar style of ragtime.

To write a successful song of this type a man must not only possess a keen sense of humor, but he must be able to discriminate between lines that will be immediately interpreted and appreciated by the average person, and those that will go over his head.

10. Flirting Songs

The flirting song could easily be classed as a novelty number, but as it is written for a specific purpose it is just as well to give it a place of its own. Songs of this description are used mostly by light dancing and singing acts, and afford the performers an opportunity to get into close relation on the stage. The songs are adaptable to a double version. The man sings the original lines, and as he proceeds, the girl slips in a phrase here and there. The double version, however, is never printed on the regular sheet music.

The story consists of small talk and a number of light compliments that a callow youth is supposed to pay to a girl he accidentally meets at a seashore. Sometimes flirting songs surprise the publishers and become big hits. "Beau-

tiful Eyes" was a novelty-flirting song and sold over a million copies.

There is no particular setting necessary. The man usually begins by eulogizing the girl's physical charms, or by telling her how much he admires her. Love, when introduced, is treated in a light, and sometimes a whimsical manner. The writing of a flirting song does not call for an unusual amount of talent. Select a pretty girl, coin or revise a few phrases that will appeal to the feminine heart, and have these set to a jingling melody.

The next time you see a singing act that has recourse to a flirting song, note how the song is utilized to work up to the real business in the act. The girl in an act not infrequently resorts to one in order to give her partner a chance to go and make a change. Should you decide to try your hand at a song of this nature endeavor to word your story so that the lines will apply to the average girl.

11. Comic and Irish-Comic Songs

The straight comic song and the Irish-comic song, wherein the humor is of the slapstick variety, rarely turns out to be a financial success. Yet from a publisher's point of view both possess good qualities. Comedians are always on the hunt for good comic numbers, and as real live comics are somewhat scarce, comedians will flock to any publisher fortunate enough to get hold of a song of this type. A comedian's sole aim is to make his audience laugh, and the more laughs he produces, the brighter grow his dreams of

a larger salary. He does not care a whit whether the publisher makes money from the song.

The out-and-out comic song appeals more to a man than to a young woman, but the trouble is that the man will not pay the dime for the music. Of course, there are certain of the feminine sex who are endowed with a keen sense of humor and who will purchase a copy of a comic number. Then there others who will buy it just to have a copy on the piano for the sake of variety—when house parties are held, a comic song helps to break the monotony of love themes. But the straight comic is very often supplanted by a seriocomic that combines love with subtle humor.

Notwithstanding all this, every now and then a comic song will prove the exception and become a national hit, as in the case of "Everybody Works but Father," and "Casey Jones." But whether such a song proves to be a hit or not a big publisher can practically always secure enough sales to leave him a small profit; and in addition to his small profit, he will have succeeded in bringing to his offices hundreds of perfomers who may be instrumental in starting some other number on the way to national popularity.

The comic song unfolds a definite story, usually of the narrative type. Each chorus contains some broad joke, which precedes the repetition of the title at the end of the chorus. The pun or joke is supposed to be the punch line. Jokes introduced in the verses are also desirable.

Comic songs call for several extra choruses, and the additional choruses concern themselves, as a rule, with the current topics of the day. The extra choruses save come-

dians from repeating the first chorus when responding to encores.

There is no prescribed length for either the verse or the chorus of a comic song. A short, snappy verse, however, is preferred to a long one. A chorus may run from four to eight lines, but unless one can sustain the vein of humor throughout an eight-line chorus, he will do well to confine himself to a shorter one. Very often performers cut a long verse in order to reach the laugh-producing lines more quickly.

Approximately all comic songs are written in a fast tempo—2-4 time.

The general construction of an Irish comic song is similar to that of a straight comic number, except that the characters in the story are taken from the Irish race and surrounded by Irish characteristics, with their proverbial good-natured wit and comicality.

12. Suggestive Songs

If the remarks of several of the big popular publishers relative to indecent songs may be accepted as a criterion of the general attitude, the day of the suggestive song has fortunately passed. The lewd lyric never was in favor with real song writers, for, apart from any moral question, they felt that they could get along without it. Several publishers who have issued songs that were a bit off color have come to realize that the popular music business may be founded on just as clean a basis as any other line, and you could not pay some of them to put out an unclean song of any kind.

The new writer should keep clear of the suggestive song, for it will never do him any good, and may tend to prejudice some clean-minded publisher against his work in general. Occasionally you may see a small publisher bidding for popularity with a suggestive number, which, as a rule, is one of his own compositions or a song written by a friend. Even from a purely commercial point of view the suggestive song will have no value for the beginner.

Occasionally some actress with little regard for the public's morals, or even her own, has a suggestive song written to order. In the past when this took place there was always a publisher ready to bring the song out, depending upon the performer's reputation to bring him a few rot-rimmed dollars. Today, however, the average person has little time for performers of this character. The public has tired of having filth served up in the form of amusement. Theatre managers have come to realize the resentment on the part of their patrons, and scores of managers have had notices posted in the dressing rooms stating that any one attempting to use a vulgar or suggestive song will have his time immediately cancelled.

No reference would have been made in this book pertaining to suggestive songs were it not for the fact that hundreds of tyros foolishly try to use this type of lyric as an opening wedge.

13. Special Songs

Broadway comedians, as well as head-liners in vaude-

ville, rather than use the songs sung nightly by the rank and file of comedians, have special songs written to order. Occasionally they pay for the work, but more often they induce a publisher to stand the expense. When the publisher foots the bill he issues the song, hoping that the comedian will create at least a local demand for it. Sometimes the comedian does, and at other times he does not. In most cases a comedian looks for a comic song, one that will afford him a chance to show at his best, and this type of song, as we have seen, is not always the kind that appeals to music buyers. A head-liner in vaudeville may have a song written for his own exclusive use, in which case he has to settle with the writer. Special songs bring the author anywhere from twenty-five to several hundred dollars.

Well-known writers are often called in to write the lyrics for a musical comedy or a burlesque show. Sometimes the writer sells for a lump sum, or he may receive an advance on account of a royalty contract. While practically all of this work is entrusted to the care of trained writers, it is not impossible for a new man to interest a well-known comedian in his work. On more than one occasion some unknown writer has mailed a good song to a performer and in this way secured an interview and later found a market for the song.

More than one musical comedy has been saved from failure by the timely interpolation of a catchy number by an outsider. When the big song in a production fails to make a hit, the producers scurry around in search of a new one, and if the man who wrote the lyrics is unable to

turn out something promising, an outsider is summoned and instructed to write one that will fit the comedian for whom the original one was written.

During 1914 one prominent woman star was having the time of her life trying to secure a song that would fit her. She canvassed every known source but without avail. One day she came across a friend who was just "breaking into" the song business and to him she confided her troubles. He said he would turn her out just what she wanted for twenty-five dollars. She told him to go ahead, and on the following day he came to her with a song, which, when tried out by her, "just stopped the show." Although she knew it was a hit for her, she did not think it had any additional value and made a present of it to another friend, a music publisher of small means.

The publisher brought the song out, capitalized on the star's reputation, and at the end of several months had created such a demand for it that he was able to sell the publishing rights to a rival firm for something like five thousand dollars.

In order to write a song for a star one has to know the personality, the ability, and the stage mannerisms of the person, and the unknown and distant writer is seldom in a position to acquire this knowledge. Furthermore, the star often suggests the theme for the song he is to feature, and offers suggestions to the lyrists regarding certain parts of the theme. If the first draft of the lyric does not shape up to the comedian's ideas the song has to be revised, or an entirely new one written. Current topics holding the public's interest in New York may appeal to the comedian

as punch material, and if they should, he would insist on having them introduced in the lyric.

Writing special songs for famous comedians, or the lyrics for Broadway shows, is the ambition of most song writers —it might be called the pinnacle of success in this particular profession; and as few writers in any field secure a start at the top, it is well for the novice not to worry himself about production numbers, but to apply his talents to other types of songs that have a more general appeal.

14. Philosophical Songs

Philosophical songs with a sentimental twist have always been favorites with the public. Very often they are offered in the form of a moral. The theme itself may run in a pathetic, sentimental or humorous vein—even to satire. In practically every case the idea conveyed furnishes mental food for the average mind, be its owner a lover of popular songs or not. One of the earliest songs of the modern popular brand, "After the Ball," was more or less of a sermon. Since its appearance the public has been treated to "It Makes No Difference What You Were, It's What You Are Today," "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now," "There'll Come a Time Some Day," "Every Little Bit Added to What You Have Makes Just a Little Bit More," "Don't Worry"—which is another way of repeating Ella Wheeler Wilcox's maxim: "Laugh and the world laughs with you." In addition to those cited, others have appeared from time to time and become popular.

The strong philosophical title is one that fits in with

some phase of life—life as men and women live it. The idea becomes more than a song—it hits the public as a sermon would. The title of a good philosophical song becomes a by-word, and frequently starts primitive minds thinking along lines that all the sermons ever preached would not. The evangelistic singer knows this fact and plays upon it. The lyrist, too, has this in mind when he writes a philosophical song. He feels that if he can make the public apply his underlying idea to everyday life he need have no fear as to the chances of his song's becoming a financial success. And when he reasons in this manner he is not likely to be disappointed.

The philosophical song may deal with a number of subjects, and may also be personal and specific in treatment, or generic and impersonal; but it is well to incorporate something that will appeal directly to the feminine heart. Fast or slow tempo may be employed, according to the nature of the theme. The lyric carrying a complete story stands the best chance of becoming a hit.

15. Ragtime

The word "ragtime" is simply a new name for an old form of music, and is really practically synonymous with syncopation. This is the verdict of musical authorities. Ragtime was the favorite style of music with the colored population in the South long before the inception of the Civil War, but no one thought of using it in connection with popular songs until the late nineties. Then Ben Harney and Harry Von Tilzer injected the syncopated

time into several songs dealing with negroes, and it was such a novelty that the public immediately took to it.

For some time after the introduction of ragtime, only songs having to do with the negro were looked upon as being ragtime numbers, whereas now, everything that carries the jerky meter, or an irregular meter that possesses a pleasing lilt, is called ragtime. A clever pianist can "rag" the most sacred song ever published.

There is no specific formula for writing ragtime, unless one cares to accept the musical definition found in the dictionary—to wit: "To Syncopate, is to begin, as a tone, on an unaccented part of a measure and end on an accented part." Writers do not refer to this rule for their conception of ragtime. They just sing their ragtime according to their musical feelings. If they secure enough snap and regular irregularity, and are still able to carry a pleasing rhythm and melody, they feel that they have ragtime. A finished musician may be able to secure a certain type of ragtime from the accepted definition, but it is doubtful if his ragtime would measure up to the form desired by the public.

When ragtime finally became established, writers were forced to change their style of phrasing in order to meet the demand for the sudden stops and starts found in ragtime. Some succeeded in doing it, and those who failed had to rely upon straight meters. Melody writers, as well, had their own troubles in altering their methods.

All popular-song writers are not able to turn out ragtime, and some of the ragtime experts could not produce a first-class ballad if you were to offer them ten thousand

dollars. Men like Andrew B. Sterling, Jack Mahoney, Al. Bryan, Joe McCarthy, and L. Wolfe Gilbert appear to be able to write any sort of lyric. Other lyrists specialize in ballads, ragtime, comic or novelty numbers, and this holds equally true with melody writers.

16. Stage Songs

A stage song is about as valuable to a publisher as a straight comic song. The boys in the streets sing and whistle it, people like to hear it in the theatres, but the song does not sell. A stage song may be of a risqué type, or of such an ultra-cheap sentimental order that it fails to make any impression on the feminine heart. In the majority of cases the stage song is a cleverly-written piece of work, containing some very good lines. William Jerome, author of "Mr. Dooley," "Rip Van Winkle Was a Lucky Man," "I'm Tired," and others, is, without a doubt, the peer of all stage song writers. Mr. Jerome is original, naturally humorous, and knows the trick of injecting homely philosophy into his lines. Some of his songs, which appear to have been written solely for stage purposes, and with some particular comedian in view, have won popular favor and earned him large royalties. In saying that a stage song does not sell, I mean that the average stage song is like a hundred-to-one shot in a horse race. There is always a slim chance for either to win out, but few like to bank on the chance. However, good, clever stage songs are not ignored by wise publishers, and if new writers feel that they are capable of turning them out they will not

lose anything by offering work of this sort to live firms. A catchy stage song may lead to something else more valuable.

"On the Old Fall River Line" is a typical example of a stage song. This song was written by Sterling and Von Tilzer. It made a good two-step, had any number of catchy lines, but it is doubtful if it ever earned any profit for the publisher.

A stage song is very much like a comic song in structure —short verses, extra choruses, and obvious puns in the lines preceding the repetition of the title at the end of the chorus. Even in stage songs of a suggestive type the puns are used in corresponding places. Sometimes the risqué stage song depends upon ambiguity for its punch.

CHAPTER III

SONG LYRICS AND MAGAZINE VERSE CONTRASTED

Popular-song lyrics and magazine verse are similar in several respects, but each calls for a different form of treatment. Few verse writers seem to realize this fact, otherwise they would not try to force popular-song lyrics to conform to the laws of conventional versification. Whenever they do, they produce with few exceptions something that is insipid and uninteresting to popular publishers, and devoid of commercial possibilities from an emotional point of view.

A song lyric to possess any appeal to either publisher or public must be simple, clear, to the point, and mostly concrete. Ambiguity or abstruseness is never tolerated. A writer is permitted to keep his audience in doubt, or mislead them up to a certain stage, in order to spring a surprise, as shown in the lyric of "Good-by, Boys," but he is expected to make every line clear before he finishes his story. The underlying idea of a popular song must be obvious, as the person listening has no time for analysis, as the magazine reader has—he must be able to follow the singer's thoughts as expressed in every line, and every word, and unless this is possible, the effect for which the author worked is lost.

A lyrist strives to paint a picture as he goes along, whereas the poet aims to stimulate thought, which necessitates more or less analysis before his own full

meaning can be perfectly interpreted. Two and three readings are sometimes necessary to divine the poet's complete intent. He is inclined to display his rhetorical tricks, and in so doing may convey a different idea to every person that reads his poem.

The material in the preceding paragraphs is not intended as a criticism of magazine verse, but has been offered to show how the conventional poet fails to find favor with his song lyrics. He is in the same position as a great composer whose music charms and holds the ear of a musically-educated person, but quite fails to win a smile or applause from the little girl who spends all her spare dimes for popular tunes.

A poem that appeared in a recent issue of *The All-Story Weekly* offers a good opportunity to illustrate the difference in handling that a song writer would have given to the same idea.

WHEN FRIENDS PART[1]

By Jack Burroughs

If you and I should say good-by,
O friend of many years,
Grief's sanctity too deep would be
For words or tears.

The knell that rings, the sob that springs
From out the riven heart,
When memories march in long defile
Would find expression in a smile—
If we should part.

The phrasing in "When Friends Part" is about the

[1] Copyright 1915 by Frank A. Munsey Co.

same as most inexperienced verse writers would employ when trying to construct a song lyric. A trained popular-song writer might think in this manner, but he would not use such phrasing. He knows from experience that diction of this sort would go over the heads of the masses. Furthermore, he never would use this title. It is too vague, almost meaningless, not to say time-worn. The line that would appeal to the lyrist for a title is the one that opens the first stanza. A girl on reading or hearing it spoken would readily see a story, one that would apply to herself and someone else. Lovers already separated would review what had passed since that sad parting. The title would be food for much retrospection.

The opening line would not only furnish a good title, but it would also suggest ideas for a chorus. The song when complete might not amount to anything, but it would at least stand a chance of appealing to the masses, because it would dovetail with their ways of thinking and feeling.

The title was given to a well-known lyrist with a request that he write a chorus for it—a simple, semi-high-class ballad chorus. Within twenty minutes he returned with the following:

CHORUS

If you and I should say good-by, the joys of yester year
To me would come back one by one and each would hold a tear.
The rose would fade, the stars grow dim, the charm of life depart,
If you and I should say good-by, if we should ever part.

In this chorus every thought, every line, and every word is simple, clear, and to the point. Any twelve-year-

old girl would understand them without having to hear them more than once. Besides, the reader will observe that there is an element of concreteness running through the entire chorus. The figurative language that has been used would not confuse the most untutored listener.

Just as the title suggested a chorus to the lyrist, the chorus would suggest material for a verse—something to lead up to the chorus. The song writer would see two lovers pondering over what would happen if fate should ever part them. Either the man or the maid might express his thoughts in the chorus, or the question of sex might be left indefinite.

Friendship would have no place in a song of this nature, for if the song were to be constructed around the idea of platonic friendship, the song maker would be forced to use a different treatment. All reference to deeper feeling would be omitted.

The magazine poem lacks the easy, conversational tone found in the song chorus, which is very essential to the success of any popular number. The poem contains words that are neither euphonious nor musical, and what is more, they are unfamiliar to the masses. *Sanctity*, for instance, even if placed in the middle of a line would not sing well, much less convey a quick and correct impression to the mind of the hearer. Then again, it would retard easy articulation.

The second stanza of the poem would be of no value to a popular-song writer. It demands an analysis—a brief one, but an analysis just the same. In the same stanza there appear two words, *riven* and *defile*, which a trained

lyrist would never dream of using. The first is too unusual, and the second too elastic for accurate comprehension. Just picture the average girl's conception of the word *defile*. To her and others who know only the general definition of common words it would conjure up the infinitive —to make filthy—to pollute. Such a word in a clean song would leave her perplexed and destroy the entire effect.

Mr. Burroughs had an idea and a title suitable for a semi-high-class ballad, which, by proper handling, could have been made to excel the majority of semi-high-class songs issued every year. The title offered possibilities for a pretty story and clean sentiment, but the thought of turning his material into a song may never have entered his mind. A firm like Leo Feist, Remick, or Stern, could surely sell twenty-five thousand copies of a semi-high-class ballad of this type without any difficulty, and at the prevailing rate of royalty, Mr. Burroughs would have received at least $125.00. If it were fortunate enough to become a hit, or a steady seller, the author would count his royalties in thousands.

Scores of poems that appear in magazines every year could be converted into songs with proper handling, and would bring the authors a great deal more than they do as magazine verse. "The House of Too Much Trouble" originally appeared in one of Munsey's publications, and from all reports the author was paid twenty-five dollars. Later on, Heelen and Helf came into possession of it, made some alterations, set it to music, and six months after its appearance as a song they collected something like six thousand dollars in royalty.

Magazine poems are somewhat similar to high-class songs. Both may deal with abstract subjects, such as seasons of the year, or themes of an impersonal nature, like flowers, rivers, trees, but the popular lyric without human beings in it is almost worthless.

Song writers, as a rule, are satisfied to stick to their own calling, perfectly willing to leave magazine verse to those adequately qualified to do this sort of writing, but the lure of "easy money" is so potent at times that some verse makers cannot resist the impulse to try their skill at lyric writing. Many of the latter are capable of turning out first-class lyrics, but they seldom succeed because they refuse to take the time and trouble to make themselves familiar with the difference in material and treatment that is essential for the success of each, and as a result they are barred from sharing in the rewards of the more humble but better-paid form of verse.

CHAPTER IV

TITLES

An original title is a gem in the song world and plays an important part in the making of a hit. Good titles are scarce, and yet hundreds of them are used in everyday conversation. A writer may come across a title a dozen times before he recognizes its song value. He sees the title, but the title does not suggest a story.

Every song that becomes a hit does not possess a first-class title, for clever exploiting and money will do a great deal for a trite title, provided the lyric contains an idea and is wedded to a catchy melody. Nothing could be more uninviting as a title than "Chinatown," which sold several hundred thousand copies. When the song was originally published it fell flat, but five years later became one of the year's best sellers as the result of a series of peculiar circumstances.

But of course the title is not all. During the year of 1915, one firm, according to reports in circulation, spent twenty thousand dollars on a song that had a good title, a good idea, and a fine chorus and melody, but in spite of all, the firm lost several thousand dollars on the investment. The verses of the lyric were wretched, and out of harmony with the rest of the sentiment. "Give Us Just Another Lincoln" was a good title, but Pat Howley said that it cost his firm virtually ten thousand dollars to find out that the public did not care for it. "Mamie"

was looked upon as a joke. Howley would have nothing to do with it, not until Will D. Cobb had paid for the plates and started it on the road to popularity.

On the other hand, "Sweet Marie," "Sweet Adeline," "Sunbonnet Sue," and "Bedelia," were big hits, and they became hits because on the whole they were good songs and received the proper sort of handling.

1. What is a Good Title?

The model title is one that lingers in memory after the song has been rendered. It conjures up images, revives past recollections and associations.

Adverbial clauses as titles come in for no little attention from ballad writers—clauses of time and place, such as "When the Harvest Days are Over," "When the Meadow Lanes are Green Again," and "Where the Sweet Magnolias Bloom," receiving preference.

The title that can be applied to the events of the day is unusually valuable, as it always receives a great deal of free publicity. It invariably furnishes "copy" for newspaper cartoonists, who never let go of it until it has become threadbare. The title becomes doubly valuable if it can in some manner be used in connection with some problem confronting the entire country. "I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier" was a title of the ideal kind, and when the Ford Peace Ship sailed away the title was given more free advertising than the publisher could ever think of buying. Newspapers all over the world used the title, and some even printed the picture of a band playing the song at the pier. As soon as an original title becomes

popular hundreds of imitators grow busy with cheap imitations, but they seldom derive any results from their time and labor.

During the Spanish-American conflict, or shortly after its termination, Will D. Cobb gave the "Good-by" titles a start. The song was a failure for the first firm that handled it, or there was something wrong, for it was sold to Howley, Haviland & Dresser, and evolved into a winner. Before the public had tired of "Dolly Gray," it was pestered with hundreds of other "good-by" numbers. Ed. Madden secured a hit with "Good-by, My Blue Bell," and several years later Mr. Cobb turned out two more winners in "Good-by, Sweet Marie," and "Good-by, Little Girl, Good-by." This writer appeared to have a monopoly on this type of war ballad.

The beginner should never become an imitator. Originality is his only chance for securing a foothold in the game. A novel title with a crudely written lyric will accomplish more than a dozen perfect lyrics that are imitations of something else. The surest way of discovering the unusual is by making yourself familiar with titles and themes that have been done to death. *You cannot tell what is original unless you know what is not.*

Again, a good title is one that suggests or conveys a definite idea to the mind of the reader or the person who hears it announced. Note the following: "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," "Last Night was the End of the World," "I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier," "All that I Ask is Love," "Somebody's Coming to My House," "Take Me Back to the Garden of Love," "I'm on My

Way to Mandalay," and "When I Leave the World Behind."

2. *The Functions of a Title*

The first function of a title is to attract the attention of performers, especially those who depend upon theatrical papers for news of late songs. Hundreds of performers never come in contact with publishers. They scan *The Clipper* from time to time in search of new material, and it is but natural that they should send for the songs whose titles have made an impression on them. Every publisher praises his own numbers to the limit, but he does not influence the seasoned performer. The latter will not send for a song unless the title appeals to him in the beginning. If he should be a personal friend of the publisher he might send for every new song that his friend has to offer and then select what he can use to the best advantage, but the first appeal of the title is what usually counts.

Obviously a strong title possesses a selling value. The big jobbers send out catalogues containing a list of the hits and the new numbers. In ordering new issues for stock the dealer is more or less influenced by the titles. He knows that he can force a certain number of new issues over his counter, and he knows that striking titles always make a good impression on most of his customers.

After the dealer comes the individual buyer. He enters the shop, looks at the array of title pages strung around the place, and when he discovers a title that appeals to him he asks the dealer to play it or have it played. The purchaser may "pass up" several other songs equally as

good, if not superior, but whose titles are hackneyed or unattractive.

3. The "Punch" in a Title

The punch in a title may be destroyed by poor phrasing. For instance, "I'm off to Meet My Mandalay," is not half as pleasing to the ear or to the sense of romance as the original title, "I'm on My Way to Mandalay." The first is flat, prosaic, unmusical, and nonsensical. Titles as they appear on sheet music very often reach that state after many revisions by the author. Sometimes the lyrist thinks of an idea for which he can find no suitable title. He may come across a novel title that has a punch, but no rhythm, and if no improvements suggest themselves at the time he puts both aside, knowing that sooner or later what he is after will come to him.

John Flynn, the author of "Sweet Annie Moore," found the punch for his title line while looking at a fire. Over and over he used to hum: "Annie Moore, sweet Annie Moore," but he could never go any further. One night while watching the burning of a hotel he heard some one remark: "And we'll never see poor Annie any more!" A servant had perished in the fire, and the remark made by a friend supplied him with the ending for his tantalizing line. The public sang away many of its blues as a result, little dreaming of the tragedy that laid the foundation for its pleasure.

CHAPTER V

THEMES

The theme in a popular song is the basic idea around which the lyric is built. The theme may either be suggested or be clearly evident in the title. Not infrequently writers allow the theme in the title to be a trifle hazy, hoping to arouse curiosity in the minds of performers and the public. Not one person in a thousand would be confused as to the literal meaning of a title like "I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier," or "All that I Ask is Love," but a title like "Last Night Was the End of the World" would keep any number guessing and wondering.

Simple themes are the only ones available for popular lyrics. Years ago, about the time that the modern popular song had become well-established, there was a big demand for dramatic themes—the stories evolving from the theme-idea leading up to a well-planned climax, sometimes to an unexpected finale, as one finds in a short-story. The "Fatal Rose of Red" and "The Story the Violets Told" are typical examples of dramatic-story themes.

Nowadays the clean-love theme is predominant and is the best one for the beginner to choose at the inception of his career. As Brett Page remarks, in his book on "Writing for Vaudeville," it is the easiest to write and has started more writers on a successful career than any other theme known. There was a time, not so very long ago, when the public patronized suggestive, morbid, and ultra-maudlin

themes, but that day has evidently passed. A general reaction has set in with the public, theatre managers, and publishers. There are a few foolish publishers who still believe that the public is not averse to filth, but they are gradually coming to their senses, and since they grind out their own rot they are of no value to the new or old song maker.

Themes should deal with persons and what they do and say. Animals are seldom used, and when used in a song meet with little or no response from the public. Animals may be introduced in humorous songs with good effect, but songs of this type are better suited for the stage than for music counters or home pianos. They amuse the public but find few purchasers.

Inanimate objects in themselves are practically worthless. No one would care to sing the praises of an automobile, but an automobile could be made the basis of a popular song, provided it were used as a stage for the convenience of human players. "He Had to Get Out and Get Under," and "Come Along With Me, Lucille," employed automobiles in this manner, but you were more interested in what took place between the lovers than you were in the machines. A rose, a range, or a river, would count for naught if unassociated with persons. In a high-class song you may sing chiefly of flowers, brooks and valleys, but not in a popular song.

If you should ever feel the call to write a national anthem for this country, or any other country, do not be asinine enough to think that you can do so by using the same formula that answers for a popular-song lyric.

"The Star Spangled Banner" is simple on the surface, but it possesses more soul and depth than all the popular songs published for years. A theme to be available for a national anthem must be one that will appeal to the classes as well as the masses; it must be capable of arousing the best within the heart of man, and it can never be promoted by the desire for possession of the almighty dollar. A so-called patriotic phrase welded to a lot of cheap sentiment and worthless doggerel will never answer as a national anthem. Some deluded mortals have ground out a few rhymed lines that referred to the Army and Navy, or to the Stars and Stripes, and then permitted their chests to become inflated, thinking they had really produced the long-looked-for national anthem.

It is not good form to start with a certain theme in the first verse and then use another in the second. In a straight song no sane publisher would tolerate it. You may vary the handling of the theme, such as introducing new characters in a comic song, or a production number, but you should revert to the theme-idea in your chorus, whether you use only one chorus or not. With the exception of adding one or two punch lines, it is not advisable to alter the first chorus. Additional punch lines seldom see the regular sheet music, being intended for the exclusive use of performers.

CHAPTER VI

THEMES TO BE AVOIDED

In the wake of every unusual catastrophe, such as the loss of the *Titanic*, a train wreck, a flood, or a holocaust, come a thousand songs written by inexperienced writers. To tyros ignorant of the ingredients of a popular song, a calamity causing a great loss of life looms up as a providential theme for a popular ballad. They believe that it should be timely because it holds the public's attention with horror or grief for the time being, little dreaming that a song is intended for just the opposite purpose—that of making people forget trouble and sorrow. While it is true that the public is always more or less interested in wrecks and other casualties, nevertheless it has no desire to have them brought up during its hours of amusement.

Experienced writers or publishers seldom attempt to foist this sort of material on the public. Recently, however, two well-known publishers thought that the *Lusitania's* sinking, owing to the warring times, offered a slight chance for a hit, and they issued songs dealing with it, but they soon discovered that the public would have none of these offerings. The songs built up around wrecks, that do see the light of day, come from small publishers who know very little about the real workings of the public mind, and from "song sharks." The song shark makes a practice of telling the new writer that the public is just ripe for a song of this type, and unfortunately the dupe from whom he is

trying to obtain money really believes him. The shark tells the same tale to every unsophisticated and ambitious victim who is trying to secure a start.

The greatest wreck that could take place would be nothing more than a nine days' wonder, and before any music publisher could have a song ready for the market the public mind would be centered on something else. Only those personally touched by the loss would think of it beyond the nine days, and even these persons would not care to sing about the wreck itself. If new writers would take the time and trouble to examine past song history they would soon discover that no wreck of any sort ever became "popular" through the medium of a popular song— though parodies that have found a slight welcome in some small locality are not included.

One instance seems at first blush to be an exception— that of the loss of the *Maine*. Shortly after the *Maine* went down, Andrew B. Sterling wrote a ballad called "On The Shores of Havana," but this song dealt rather with the sentiment and heroism of the sinking than with the loss of life and suffering.

The newspapers furnish all the pathos, sentiment, and morbidness demanded by the public, and very often before the editors see fit to "let up on" wrecks, the public is bored by the repetition of details. One might just as well ask a man to sing a comic song at the funeral of the woman he loved as to expect the public to sing, hum, and whistle songs having to do with the agony and death of unfortunates caught in a fire or a flood.

Other topics that hold the interest of intelligent minds,

such as eugenics, or votes for women, do not appear to have any serious place in popular songs. As a rule people taken up with these subjects have very little time for singing light ditties or ragtime. The masses have a general idea of these national issues, but forget all about them once the hours for pleasure and amusement arrive. A clever writer might be able to interest a small element by presenting a topic of this sort in humorous or satirical vein, but the new writer with his lack of experience would not be able to do anything with such a theme, and would do well to turn his thoughts to others more promising and more profitable.

The consensus of opinions holds that the popular song should be aimed at the young generation, especially the heart of the sentimental woman still in her teens. This is the period when she thinks mostly of pleasure and romance, and not of the real problems of life. While she is unwed and troubled only with heartaches, she can afford to spend dimes without having to account for them to someone else. Prior to her marriage she finds plenty of time to be gay, sentimental, or sad, and it is the duty of the song writer to study her and catch her changing moods. If you write about things that appeal to the young heart you will be aiming at the hearts and emotions of young women all over the country, in fact, all over the world; whereas if you select a subject like "votes for women," you may be confining your appeal to a circumscribed element. Then again the girl in the adolescent period seldom bothers herself with eugenics or other problems, and if she does, she is not likely to be of the kind that revels in popular songs and ragtime.

The names of Presidents and former Presidents, regardless of their popularity, are not good subjects for songs. A sentimental young woman who has just had a spat with her John Henry will be more concerned and alarmed over the tiff than she will be over the outcome of the greatest Presidential election ever held, and while in that frame of mind she would rather sing a song like "You Made Me Love You" than read a gem of an oration by a President. Women will cheer a President's name or picture when brought before them in a theatre, but they have very little desire to sing about him in the home. The destiny of a nation is nothing compared to what John Henry will do on the following Saturday evening.

All the nation loves a lover, but all the nation does not love the same President, and you could not ask a man or a woman with Republican ideas to sing about a Democratic President, or vice versa. Young and old men will shout themselves hoarse for a President, but men do not buy music, not for their own use, unless they be musicians. When they do part with their money for sheet music it is usually in the interest of some Juliet, and from past experiences the Romeos have learned that Juliet prefers songs that deal with imaginary beings, pathos, romance and gayety.

Prosaic domestic troubles possess little or no song value, unless they are presented in a humorous way. Themes dealing with physical deformities, morbidness, or slum life should also be shunned.

Keep clear of the comic features in the Sunday and daily newspapers. The public secures all it cares for by reading

the papers. When it goes to theatres or picture houses it is on the lookout for something new. Furthermore, a comic feature enjoying popularity in the West may not be known in the East. When a publisher thinks he sees a chance for a local hit based on a newspaper creation he will turn to the finished writer who is capable of incorporating local "punch."

Occasionally a show like "Mutt and Jeff" is written around a newspaper comic, and a song adopting the caption is used in the show. In such cases the owners of the show seldom hope for national popularity for the song but aim to sell the music after each performance. Not having to go to the expense of special exploitation they very often derive a reasonable amount of profit from the sales; but an outsider, especially a newcomer, would have very little chance of landing a song of this type.

Slang phrases that have already become popular are of little value to a song writer. The lyrist tries to think of titles that can be used as a slang phrase. By the time a phrase acquires national popularity its novelty has vanished and the public is looking for something new—and the lyrist may provide it.

CHAPTER VII

TIMELINESS

First of all, timeliness has to do with the busy and the dull seasons in the music business. From May until September there is very little doing in the sale of sheet music, and it is during this slack season that publishers lay plans for the coming autumn and winter. Through the summer months the big publishers issue enough songs to keep things moving, holding what they think are hits for the time when the theatres will open and the lovers will find more enjoyment over a piano than they do in a park or on the sands of a seashore.

The moving picture airdromes have proved very valuable to the publishers, affording them numerous opportunities for song "plugging." And as long as the music-buying public is given a chance to hear new, catchy tunes, a certain portion of it will respond by purchasing, but the quantity of music bought during the summer is nothing to be compared to that which is taken home to pianos from September to May.

Some publishers make a practice of issuing a summer song every spring, so if you have material for a summer song you had better offer it shortly after Christmas holidays, otherwise it may be untimely for the coming summer. In the late summer or early fall is the time to submit winter songs. In general, June and July are good months in which to try your luck with songs, for it is about this

time that the live publishers are trying to select a catalogue for the coming season, which must be ready for the opening of the vaudeville and general theatrical business about the middle of August. If you do not succeed in placing your songs before September, and have not exhausted all the possible markets, continue sending or taking them to the reliable houses until you have gone the rounds. Vaudeville singers and the shows using songs like to get hold of new numbers around the winter holidays, and publishers have to be ready to supply them. Whatever you do, avoid imitating the hits that have been popular during the last preceding months.

A song may be meritorious and yet untimely. At the present writing the public is more or less responsive to war songs of a certain type, but a war song dealing with the Blue and Gray, which would have been "all the rage" ten years ago, would not be likely to interest anyone today. The theme has had its day. A few years ago the public had been keyed up to a religious pitch and for a time could not get enough of semi-sacred songs, but now it is in another mood, and a semi-sacred number would be more or less untimely. Songs dealing with moving-picture actors or actresses have never been timely. People desire to see the pictures, not to sing about them.

When the "Robt. E. Lee" was popular, plantation songs charactarized by the lilt and shuffle so well known in the south were very timely, but not now. Later on they may be revived.

Someone may be tempted to ask if there is such a thing as a song that is always timely. The answer is: The song

that carries a heart-interest story, dealing with real human beings, one that lingers with the hearer after the singer has disappeared, is the song that always was, always is, and always will be timely. If you can conceive that sort of story and have it blended to a melody that stirs and thrills the human heart you need go no further.

CHAPTER VIII

LYRIC CONSTRUCTION—LENGTH AND TRANSITION

1. *Length*

In the early days of the modern type of popular song the lyric frequently carried three long verses and a short chorus, and not infrequently a long chorus was used. The stories were not so condensed as they are today, so in order to fill in, the writers were compelled to utilize many unnecessary details. Today writers aim at conciseness and brevity in the verses, depending upon the imagination of the public to furnish the unwritten details.

Short verses are preferred for several reasons. In the first place, a performer relying upon his singing does not care to use long-winded songs, as they limit him in quantity. He can sing three short songs during the same length of time that he would require to render two long numbers. Then again, the average audience would rather hear three good short songs than two long-drawn-out numbers.

Comic songs very often have four, five and six verses, as well as an equal number of choruses, but each stanza and each chorus must carry its own punch, so as not to make the singing of later parts of the song necessary to understanding that which has gone before. This is vital. Additional verses or choruses are always valuable, so long as the writer is able to inject a real laugh into each suc-

ceeding verse or chorus, and, if possible, make the whole effect cumulative.

The semi-high-class ballads hold to the old order of things—a four-line verse and a four-line chorus. Recently, however, a few writers have tried to add some variety by reversing the original form—using a short verse and a long chorus.

Whether a verse shall be short or long is left to the option of the writer. When a publisher feels that a verse or a chorus is too draggy he will suggest cutting. A writer should not use any more lines than are necessary to tell his story, or convey his idea. Leave the details to the imagination of the public.

At the present writing, lyrists, publishers, and vocalists prefer the short verse with the long chorus. Writers expect that a time will come when a popular-song lyric will consist of one short verse and a chorus. After one has heard a verse and a chorus he does not care for any more, and if he takes a fancy to any particular song he would rather have the chorus repeated than hear the second verse.

The length of the line deserves consideration, though in many cases its length is determined by the form of meter and rhythm selected by the lyrist. The idea you may be trying to convey will also have a bearing on the length of a line. You should not leave the sense of a line incomplete just for the sake of using some particular length. Every line does not have to be a complete sentence, but each should be carried to a natural pause before a new one is started. This is an important point.

When writing a song it is well to try to incorporate the greater part of your punch in the first verse and chorus, for a poor verse and chorus will never be saved by a strong second verse.

2. *Transition*

The copula or transition of a song lyric might be called the invisible word, phrase or query that connects the verse with the chorus. As most experienced writers finish the chorus first, and them put together a verse that will lead to the chorus, they do not meet with much difficulty in this respect. They can *feel* when a verse does not work smoothly into a chorus, but the new writer very often completes his verse without establishing any connection with the chorus; that is to say, his chorus does not appear to be the logical continuation of his verse, as it should be.

When a verse ends with some of the stereotyped clauses, such as, "The maiden softly sighed"—or said, or smiled, or replied—the connection is obvious, but as, fortunately, all verses do not end in this fashion, the writer should make certain that his final word suggests the relationship between verse and chorus. When the stock phrases fit in smoothly, one need not bother, for the mere altering of a lead-word into the chorus will not make much difference, provided the word used is a natural one for the occasion, but the ending used should not be forced in. One of Raymond A. Browne's recent ballads is a good example of how the stock type of ending has been adopted:

THE ROSE THAT NEVER FADES[1]

Words by RAYMOND A. BROWNE Music by W. C. POWELL

Somebody's sitting alone in the shadows
While watching the firelight glow,
Somebody's wand'ring in Mem'ry Land,
As scenes of the past come and go;
Somebody caresses a few faded flowers,
Some roses, all withered and dry,
And a strange, sweet perfume
Seems to fill all the room,
As somebody says with a sigh:

CHORUS

Once you were beautiful roses, worn on an angel's breast,
Red, yellow, and white, what a beautiful sight
Till you faded like all of the rest.
Years have gone by and made changes, to you and the dearest of maids,
But the Golden rose of memory is the rose that never fades.

"The Tulip and the Rose" employs an implied connective, the last line not directly referring to the chorus. The reader, however, can see and feel the close relationship that the verse bears to the chorus.

WHEN YOU WORE A TULIP AND I WORE A BIG RED ROSE[2]

Words by JACK MAHONEY Music by PERCY WENRICH

I met you in a garden in an Old Kentucky town,
The sun was shining down, you wore a gingham gown;
I kissed you, as I placed a yellow tulip in your hair,
Upon my coat you pinned a rose so rare.

[1] Copyright 1915 by P. J. Howley, New York.
[2] Copyright 1915 by Leo Feist, Inc., New York.

Time has not changed your loveliness,
You're just the same to me,
I love you yet, I can't forget,
The days that used to be.

CHORUS

When you wore a tulip, a sweet yellow tulip,
And I wore a big red rose;
When you caressed me, 'twas then Heaven blessed me,
What a blessing no one knows.
You made life cheery, when you called me "dearie,"
'Twas down where the blue grass grows;
Your lips were sweeter than julep, when you wore a tulip,
And I wore a big red rose.

In "The Tulip and the Rose" the verse and the chorus could be joined, so closely connected is the thought leading from the one to the other.

Any one with a modicum of intelligence should be able to tell at a glance whether his verse-idea leads logically into his chorus, but it is a fact that the work of new writers shows the most "weird" attempts that one could imagine at making verse and chorus dovetail.

The last line of the second verse should be worded so that it will refer back to the chorus. Do not slight your lyric in this respect because some other one may do so and "get away with it." Every additional bit of quality that you can give to your songs will repay you in the long run, for it is these seemingly unimportant phases that go to make the finished product and command attention.

CHAPTER IX

LYRIC CONSTRUCTION—METER, RHYTHM AND RHYME

1. Meter

The definition of *meter* in the dictionary reads as follows: "The character of a composition as being divisable into measures equal in time and length, and similar in rhythmic construction." This definition applies to classical music and to real poetry—or at least the new popular-song writer thinks so. But the practiced lyrist recognizes no metrical dictum in his work; if he can make his lyrics sing well, that is all he cares about, and in order to do so he is ready to violate every metrical rule.

The popular-song writer endeavors to introduce novelty in his meter, and at times his very irregularity may be the means of attracting attention to his song, but in spite of the fact that he appears to deal in disorder, he has to evolve some kind of order and sequence, otherwise his work would be unsingable. He may start his verse with an iambic foot without knowing it, but he knows just where the stress falls in each line, and he has sense enough to emphasize the corresponding points in his second verse. He seeks for what some term a logical and easy-singing lilt.

New writers have a habit of writing the first verse in one meter, and then using a different meter in the second verse—how they expect the same melody to fit both verses it is difficult to understand. Others believe that if

they have the same number of words, or an equal number of syllables, in both verses, the same melody should be suitable for each.

Practically all of the successful lyrists who have had no training in musical or poetical meters have acquired their knowledge of meter-building from writing parodies. Every time one of them wrote a parody he had to assimilate another man's meter before he could sing new words to it, and in this manner he put himself in possession of scores of different song-meters. Later, when turning out original work, one of these meters suggested itself and he blended a new set of words to it, not conscious of just where he had gotten the meter.

The trained song writer does not always obtain the desired meter at the outset. He may have in mind a certain lilt, which may come to him readily in the first verse, but he may meet with all sorts of difficulty in fitting his words and ideas to just the same meter in the second verse. In many cases a meter will round itself out; that is to say, the lyrist will sing as the words suggest themselves, and when he has finished with his verse he will let it stand, provided the tempo—the time-arrangement—and the sentiment correspond. There are times when a song writer is in doubt as to whether he should put a song in a slow or fast tempo, and to be on the safe side he seeks advice and suggestions from some of his fellow writers.

There are certain rigid laws that apply to poetry, but it would be folly to try to make popular songs conform to them. Several poets have felt that they could accomplish this task, but they never made any progress.

When using words like *flowers* or *memory*, writers often eliminate a syllable rather than reconstruct a line. Singers at times fail to make note of the ellipsis and have trouble in memorizing the melody correctly. They may even fall behind the orchestra when using the song on the stage. Use shortened words when they are absolutely necessary to preserve sentiment, rhythm and meter, but if you can find synonyms that will answer just as well, better have recourse to them and avoid the contractions. The object of these pains is to make the learning of the song, as well as the singing of it, an easy task for vocalists. Performers feel that they have enough trouble without being asked to memorize tricky twists in the meter.

The meter, and the rhythm—by which is meant the lilting movement—of the verse are seldom held in the chorus. Retaining the meter of the verse would be likely to make the song monotonous. The tempo may be the same, or it may differ. Some verses are written in common or 4-4 time, with a waltz chorus following; while others have a slow tempo in the verse and a march tempo in the chorus. No one can tell you just what method to follow, or say what you cannot do. Adopt any course that you feel is logical from the song writer's point of view, and if you happen to mince matters someone will point out your errors and very likely offer helpful suggestions. In time you will come to know the difference between good and bad meters.

2. *Rhythm*

To song writers' rhythm, as has just been said, means

lilt or swing. If a song does not carry a good swing, one that is consistent throughout the entire number, it will have a jarring effect on the ear. Rhythm can scarcely be looked upon as something tangible, like a meter, or a method of rhyming, to be selected at will; it is more the effect of the other component parts of the song's having been properly blended. Study the lilt in the swinging lines of "The Tulip and the Rose," and other lyrics already quoted, and see how almost every line seems to sing itself.

3. Rhyme

Good rhymes indicate ability and care on the part of the writer, and have a pleasing effect on the ear. Some writers, usually the more intelligent set, take pride in employing proper rhymes, while others rhyme in a hit-or-miss fashion, satisfied if two words have the slightest semblance of related sound. Then there is a class of lyrists who do not know the difference between a good and a poor rhyme, so that the words intended for rhyming fairly laugh at each other. Writers of this ilk will rhyme *alone* with *home*, *lane* with *same*, and so on. Such mistakes, of course, arise from failure to note the foundation sounds of the words intended to rhyme. The *n* in *alone* cannot rhyme with the *m* in *home*, and the same lack of harmony appears between *lane* and *same*.[1] To a natural lyrist, the proper rhyming of words comes easily. Poor rhymes will

[1] Those who wish to study rhyme will find a valuable chapter on the subject in *The Art of Versification*, by J. Berg Esenwein and Mary Eleanor Roberts, in "The Writer's Library," published uniform with this volume.

not kill all the chances of a song's success, but good rhymes will enhance them.

The public has been educated up to the idea of rhymes in popular songs, hence blank verse has no place in them. Using the same word to rhyme two lines is almost as bad as no rhymes, or blank verse. Words that are spelled differently, but which have practically the same sound, such as *to* and *two* are not desirable. There is no law that prescribes their use, but there is no sense in having recourse to them when a little effort will enable you to do better.

No one can tell you just what method to adopt in rhyming—that is to say, just what order your rhymes should follow. Originality in rhyming is valuable and tends to embellish a lyric, but whatever rhyming method you select for the first verse must be employed in the succeeding verses. That is, if you begin your first verse with couplet rhymes—rhyming line 1 with line 2, and line 3 with line 4— see that you do likewise with the second. If you have triplets in any part of your opening verse, make certain that triplets occur at a corresponding point in your second. In the chorus of Gilbert's "Little Dream Girl" triplets are used; to wit: "Don't let me waken, learn I'm mistaken, find my faith shaken."

The rhyming method used in the chorus does not have to follow that of the verse. And as the swing of the chorus usually varies from that of the verse, the rhyming method has a tendency to follow suit.

Some semi-high-class ballads, as well as juvenile songs, that have four lines in verses and chorus, often use a

couplet-rhyming formula throughout the entire song. Whether this procedure should be followed or not is optional with the writer.

For a reasonable sum a dictionary of rhymes or rhyming word-book[1] may be purchased at any first class bookstore. Such a volume is not absolutely necessary, as there is not a great variety in popular song rhymes, but reading a book of this sort surely will not weaken your natural ability to rhyme. Rhyming is closely associated with euphony, which has been considered in another chapter.

[1] The publishers of this volume have in preparation for early publication "The Rhymer's Word-Book," by J. Berg Esenwein and Charles Morris.

CHAPTER X

LYRIC CONSTRUCTION—THE STORY-ELEMENT

The popular-song lyric not based upon a specific idea or a definite story stands but a slender chance of becoming a hit. Unabridged biographies of the characters or the full details of the idea do not have to be set forth, but the lyrist must tell or imply an idea or a story that is sure to be developed further by the imagination.

A short time ago "Pat" Howley said that while he was associated with the late Paul Dresser in the publishing business, he seldom gave a second thought to a manuscript that did not contain a human-interest story or some definite idea. And for several years he picked more hits than any other publisher in the business. Today, Leo Feist, who is considered to be the peer of the ablest in "picking winners," must be a strong believer in the story element, if the hits he publishes are any proof of his working theory.

People like to visualize action as they sing and as they hear; otherwise the number of instrumental hits would equal the vocal, and this they do not by far. Now, whether the lyric or the melody is the more important part of a song is rather difficult to say—that is, to say it and be able to prove the contention. This subject has been a source of endless discussion among song writers, and is still a mooted issue. A song is supposed to sell as a result of its appeal to the human heart—its emotional

appeal—which suggests that the story is of the greater value; but if a strong story is wedded to a poor melody, the public will not care for either; and vice versa. This is about as far as the lyrists and composers advance in their arguments, and it is just as well to stop where they do, remembering that the successful song-story is not merely a melody but also a story, and not merely a story but also a melody. Excellence in both are absolutely necessary.

In former years lyric writers endeavored to build up a series of dramatic situations leading up to a climax. Consciously or unconsciously they fashioned their work after the model of a short-story. At the present writing, however, this form of construction is seldom utilized. The preference is for a single, striking situation and its climax.

"A Little Lost Child" is a good example of the song with such a swift, dramatic climax. The language and the form would not pass with the humblest editor as poetry, but the essential situation, the dramatic action, and the melody, all taken together, produced the effective result.

A LITTLE LOST CHILD[1]

Words by Edw. B. Marks Music by Jos. W. Stern

A passing policeman found a little child,
She walked beside him, dried her tears and smiled.
Said he to her kindly, "Now you must not cry,
I will find your mama for you bye and bye."

[1] Copyright 1894 by Jos. W. Stern & Co.

At the station when he asked her for her name
And she answered, "Jennie," it made him exclaim:
"At last of your mother I have found a trace,
For your little features bring back her sweet face!

CHORUS

"Do not fear, my little darling, and I will take you right home,
Come and sit down close beside me, no more from me you shall roam,
For you were a babe in my arms when your mother left me one day;
Left me at home, deserted, alone,
And took you, my child, away.

" 'Twas all through a quarrel, madly jealous she
Vowed then to leave me, woman-like, you see.
Oh, how I loved her, grief near drove me wild!"
"Papa, you are crying," lisped the little child.
Suddenly the door of the station opened wide,
"Have you seen my darling?" an anxious mother cried.
Husband and wife then, meeting face to face;
All is soon forgotten in one fond embrace.

In the "Little Lost Child" the author told a complete story and left a great deal more to the imagination. Every line expressed a concise and tangible thought. The reason for the mother's jealousy, what the captain in the station had to say, how the woman was dressed, or what the characters did when they reached home, did not concern the author—the singer and the hearer could readily conjure it up. The story overcomes the literary crudity.

The magazine poet may sing of the seasons, the flowers, the planets, or the rippling waves; his work will contain heart-interest and beauty for his admirers, and lovers of

poetry in general; but when a popular-song writer employs this sort of material he has to subordinate it to persons and the story element, and this should be a warning to the newcomer not to try to write until he has a story to tell or a clear-cut idea to express—one that deals with human beings and their definite happiness or woe.

Simple stories, told in a simple way, are what the public likes. Each story, however, calls for its own particular environment. A few words or a couple of phrases will suffice to supply local color. In a rustic ballad the barest reference to a stream, a mountain, or a cottage is often found to be sufficient.

A general or a specific setting may be used in rustic ballads, as in "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine." In the opening line the lyrist gives the keynote to his setting by the use of three words—Mountain, Virginia, Pine. In the following line he adds to the picturesque by introducing a cabin home. In five lines he tells you where the girl lives, where she is, suggests that she is poor, furnishes her name, and informs you that she is waiting for her lover day by day, hoping for a wedding on his return. In order to accomplish this much the lyrist had to shave his phrases and discard every superfluous word.

The second verse is devoted more to details. It does not add anything to the strength of the story, and appears to verify the consensus of opinions among song writers, that the second verse in a ballad is unnecessary. However, the fact that it is seldom sung and of no great value to a song should not lead new writers to slight it. Give your

best to both verses and in the long run you will not lose anything.

The story-element applies to practically every style of song, be it sentimental, pathetic, humorous, or philosophical. The first thing that a publisher desires to know about a song is the sort of idea or story it contains. And always bear in mind that the story moves the heart of an audience, while the melody animates the feet.

CHAPTER XI

LYRIC CONSTRUCTION—PUNCH

Before considering several specific elements of lyric construction it is necessary to examine a factor that is both general and specific—*punch.*

"Punch" is a much-abused word in every line of business. When something does not appeal to the average man and he does not care to give reasons for his dislike or is incompetent to do so, he falls back upon the bromide —"It has no punch." Any one can say that a song, a story, or a photoplay lacks punch, but few are capable of dissecting some particular play, song or story and proving that it is devoid of that much-sought quality.

In discussing song writing, punch is overworked. Some use the word without the slightest idea as to what it means. To one man, punch means a clever line; to another, a pretty strain; and to a third, a unique idea. Under present conditions the money spent on advertising, plus the handling of a song, has more to do with turning out a hit than the so-called punch. Today there are songs reposing peacefully on some publisher's shelf that contain more real punch than half-a-dozen recognized hits, but the songs that did become hits would have been failures had they not possessed some sort of punch for the public.

Now, what is the punch in a popular song? Does it lie in one or two lines, in one or two strains, in the underlying idea, or in the whole effect?

In other parts of this book comments on punch have been made. They apply to specific instances. Here punch is treated from a general point of view, supplemented by a few concrete instances. The punch in a popular song is a song's magnetism, its life, its personality. As a magnet, it is endowed with a number of drawing powers, each power exercising an influence over certain emotional traits found in the human breast. A popular song is like a painting—certain colors blended after one fashion will appeal to one class, and the same colors rearranged will lose their drawing power over the first class, but appeal with equal strength to another set. Is the punch in the song or in the people?

For the sake of argument and comparison, punch may be conceded to rest in the song. The real punch in a song is the thing that lingers with one after the singer has vanished; it is like the essence of a good story, as Robert H. Davis, the genial editor of Munsey's magazines, once remarked, while discussing the short-story: "It is something that comes back from time to time." In a song it may be a strain that returns, fugitive and elusive, and awakens old memories, making us long to hear the entire song over again. It may be the scenes and the sayings of the characters that seem to have been taken from our own lives; it may be the fundamental idea that harmonizes or conflicts with our philosophy and ideals: but this longing to take the song to ourselves, to hum it day after day, can scarcely come from our liking of one line or one strain. The idea, line, or strain has simply acted as the strongest magnetic point, and unless the remainder of the

points that go to make up the whole possess magnetism, the strength of the foremost point will gradually weaken, leaving us disappointed or indifferent.

Some persons are susceptible to a lively rhythm, and as soon as they hear one of this sort—one that harmonizes with the natural musical feeling—they respond immediately: every nerve and fibre begins to vibrate in unison with the rhythm of the song or the instrumental number. The sentiment in the song may not appeal to them, and as a result of this condition you will frequently hear: "I think the melody is fine, but I don't care for the words." But they will buy the song in order to hear it from time to time. On the other hand, a person whose natural sense of rhythm is of a low order may like the sentiment and purchase the song that he may have the pleasure of visualizing the scenes portrayed in the lyric. The music is smooth enough not to jar, and in living the story over he becomes almost oblivious to the melody.

Take another case. A girl is parted from her lover. She listens to a new song that fills her heart with regrets and hopes. Perhaps the tune has a tendency to make her sad, while the story counteracts the despondency by its optimism. For the time being she does not realize that she is listening to a popular song—her spirit has been transported to another place, a point where her life appears to have ended. When she leaves the theatre she does not remember one line or a single strain, but from time to time snatches of both return to her and bring her pleasure, mingled with pain. After hearing the song several times she begins to memorize some of it—most likely the chorus

—and to her the punch-lines will be the ones that strike the deepest into her own little problem. Then again, before she can derive any benefit from the song she may have to hear it all over again.

No one with any knowledge of popular songs and the emotions of human beings will contend that individual punch-lines do not possess intrinsic value. Punch-lines assist in the making, but do not make any song, for very often a person comes to like or dislike a song before he has heard the "planted" punch-line in the chorus. One song of recent issue met with a great deal of disapproval simply because a trite and incongruous verse had been prefixed to a pretty chorus. There was enough punch in the chorus to make the song, had the idea, sentiment and phrasing of the verse harmonized with the chorus. For some the chorus was strong enough to make them buy the song, while others who were pleased by the chorus could not kill the indifference or the dislike created by the verse.

This one instance must make it obvious to any sane person that no particular strain or line will turn a song into a hit. The song in question had all the advertising and publicity necessary, but its shortcomings offset its good features. Use punch-lines whenever you can, but do not ask them to do the impossible—that of making one good line carry six poor ones.

Will D. Cobb had the happy faculty of injecting individual punch-lines into his songs, but he always made the rest of his song carry a certain amount of punch as well. In "Good-bye, Sweet Marie," he said: "And I'll break the fighting line like you broke this heart of mine."

Al. Bryan had punch in his title, verse, and chorus; in fact, the entire song was just charged with punch. Note the first half of his chorus:

I DIDN'T RAISE MY BOY TO BE A SOLDIER[1]

I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier,
I brought him up to be my pride and joy,
Who dares to place a musket on his shoulder,
To shoot some other mother's darling boy?

He put so much punch—heart-interest punch among others—in his lines that he set the whole country talking about the song. Some other writer could have taken the idea and killed the natural punch by poor handling.

A wise method to adopt is to divide your punch into six equal parts; allow two-sixths to your verse, three to your chorus, and one to your second verse. The first will create a desire to hear your chorus, and the second verse will sustain the interest and make an audience wish to hear the chorus repeated. And don't forget that in each verse and in the chorus the best position for the punch is near or at the end of that particular group of lines, so as to bring feeling to a climax of effect.

[1] Copyright 1915 by Leo Feist, Inc., New York.

CHAPTER XII

LYRIC CONSTRUCTION—THE CHORUS

A popular song that lacks a good chorus receives very little attention from performers, which means that the public will not become acquainted with the song, and the song will stand a slim chance of ever becoming a hit. A good chorus is nine-tenths of any hit. It is an almost impossible task to write a catchy chorus without having some specific idea for a foundation. Experienced writers are well aware of this fact and seldom try it, but beginners often attempt to turn out an entire song as they would an ordinary letter—they write anything and everything that comes to their mind.

The chorus is the title expanded. Sometimes the title and the material for the chorus come to the lyrist in a flash, while at other times the lyrist has to spend days, even weeks, racking his brains for ideas and phrases that will dovetail with his title.

Until a snappy or appealing chorus has been written the lyric writer does not, as a rule, concern himself about the verses. Possible lines for verses may pop into his head as he walks along the street or rides in a train. These he jots down at random, their value increasing or decreasing in accordance with the progress and possible alterations of the unfinished chorus.

Approximately all lyrists agree that a chorus must contain a punch for performers as well as for the public. In

supplying a punch for the public the writers kill two birds with one stone, for what appeals to the public will bring applause to the performer.

A short time ago, Harry Von Tilzer, the most consistent and successful hit-writer for the past twenty years, was questioned as to his theory of a chorus.

"Unless I can get the kind of chorus that I want," he said, "I never trouble my head about the verses. Two good verses are of no value unless you have a good chorus."

"Are you always satisfied with the first chorus handed to you by your lyric writers?" he was asked.

"Not by a long shot," he smiled. "Sometimes I am never satisfied with choruses that are handed to me; and without wishing to take any credit from some of my former collaborators, it might interest you to know that although I am looked upon as a melody writer, I have written the words for the choruses of seven-tenths of my songs."

"And the titles—who furnishes them?"

"I discover many of them," he went on. "A title comes to me and I immediately feel the rhythm of it. Then lines and strains come rolling into my brain. There are times when the chorus does not satisfy me—that is, the words—and if I can't get just what I want I call in a lyric writer."

"Is it easier for you to write songs now than when you first began?"

"A great deal easier. Now I have a clearer idea as to what the public likes, and I have but to think of a line or

hear one to know whether it has any song-value or not. Practice and experience have taught me this, but all the practice in the world will not make me or any other writer infallible."

Mr. Von Tilzer favors the use of punch-lines in the chorus, as do most of the other writers and composers of note. Some lyrists maintain that a song that does not show one or more individual punch-lines in a chorus will never amount to anything. Such a theory, however, is a bit far-fetched, for dozens of songs might be mentioned that possessed no particular punch-lines. "The Old Mill Stream" is one, and enough to disprove the punch contention. But punch-lines do add immeasurably to the value of a song, and anything that promises to increase the chances of success should not be omitted.

But there must be punch in the melody as well, for a lyric, regardless of the quantity and quality of its punch-lines, cannot make a poor melody popular. Punch in melody is too elusive to be pointed out. Very often the harmony furnished by the arranger has a great deal to do with the punch in a melody. One arranger will get twice as much out of a melody as another, and for this reason writers should not entrust their songs to third-rate arrangers. A man may be a first-class musician, fully capable of arranging any composition according to rigid technique, and yet know naught of the kind of arranging that appeals to the pianist of mediocre ability. Arrangers like Harry Collins and Al. Doyle have made a special study of the so-called popular-song harmony, and as a result of years of association with the vaudeville world

they are familiar with the little artifices and cues that make songs appeal to performers.

Good harmony probably had a great deal to do with the success of "The Old Mill Stream." There is nothing extraordinary about the melody itself. It is simple, dreamy, and soothing, carrying with it a sense of quietude which blends well with rural atmosphere conjured up by the story. The third line is a repetition of the first, and the first is very similar to the opening line in the chorus of "Her Name is Rose."

Twenty years ago song writers never dreamed of individual punch-lines, and seldom made any effort to emphasize any particular line, except in humorous songs. The song maker wrote the story as it came to him and allowed the public to pass judgment. The ballads of those days contained as much as, if not more, merit than the songs appearing at the present time. Rustic ballads especially, that have been popular during the past five years, are forgotten, while people still sing the old ballads, such as "My Old New Hampshire Home," "The Girl I Loved in Sunny Tennessee," "On the Banks of the Wabash," "My Little Georgia Rose," and others.

According to the general conception, the punch-line is supposed to precede the last line in the chorus, and it must be one that stands out in originality from all the rest. Note the lines that occupy corresponding points in the old-time ballads.

"The Girl I Loved in Sunny Tennessee" has this line:

As the moon rose in its glory then I told life's sweetest story.

There is nothing very "punchy" in this, still it made a strong impression, and always will. It represents clean sentiment.

"On the Banks of the Wabash" contains:

Through the sycamores the candle lights are gleaming.

Probably the last thing that Paul Dresser had in his mind when he penned the foregoing line was individual "punch." Nevertheless, his line will live in the hearts of many for years to come.

In "My Little Georgia Rose," the next to the last line is:

Promise that you will ever be true.

How simple yet how filled with sentiment it is, especially when coming from a loving father about to part with his only child. Bob Roden put the line into the song because he felt it just belonged to the rest of the sentiment and added pathos to the story.

"My Old New Hampshire Home" carries the following:

In the village churchyard near sleeps the one I love so dear.

When this line was written, the writers were more concerned with the coming week's room rent than any particular brand of "punch," tangible or intangible, according to Mr. Von Tilzer.

From the remarks made concerning the rustic ballads of bygone days you must not infer that the writers of today are not competent to turn out first-class songs. There will always be a certain number of finished writers for every style of song, and the meritorious songs that

appear from time to time are cogent proof of their ability. These comments are offered simply to show that hits were possible without individual and carefully planned punch lines.

In striving for simplicity in a chorus one should be careful not to bring in too much repetition. The use of repetition has its advantages and disadvantages. A little is used to confine range and secure simplicity, while unnecessary repetition produces a *tom tom* effect. As for the repeating of a line in the lyric, title excepted, the writer has very little space for it in a good song.

Catch-phrases in any part of the lyric are always more or less valuable, but to be of value they must harmonize with the general sentiment. Newcomers frequently introduce a so-called catch-line that has absolutely nothing in common with the sentiment or idea, and instead of being a catch-line it becomes a joke and makes the remainder of the song appear ridiculous. Such obvious artifices jar on the public's nerves and help to kill the chances of the song's success.

In theatres and other places of amusement, as well as in department stores where songs are demonstrated, the chorus is always repeated. In fact, in department stores the demonstrators usually confine themselves to singing choruses, for they have found out that unless the chorus makes an impression the people will not buy. If a song contains an easy-singing chorus the audience in a theatre will pick it up immediately, and many will hum snatches of it on the way home. A tricky melody or a poorly-worded chorus will slip from their minds and be forgotten.

An audience will sing a simple chorus in unison, whereas one that is not easy to pick up will make their attempts sound like a dozen persons singing a dozen different songs at the same time.

Few persons ever take the time or trouble to memorize more than the chorus of a song, and some are unable to recognize a new song until they hear a certain strain. To them, the strain that recalls the title and suggests the rest of the chorus is the punch-strain. But, as we have seen, what is punch for one may not be for another, and this is one reason why it is wise to inject a little punch all through the chorus.

CHAPTER XIII

LYRIC CONSTRUCTION—DICTION

Unusual words, uncommon names, obscure places, and polysyllables, instead of being advantageous to a song, are a detriment to its chances of success. The fact that some out-of-the-way river or mountain near your home town conjures up romance and sentiment in your heart does not signify that either will do likewise for people in other parts of the country. Always try to bear in mind that your audience is the entire country.

Simple words that one hears in everyday conversation will answer for all song purposes. You will not interest persons by the kind of words you use, neither by the number. It is the order in which you place those words with which they are thoroughly familiar that attracts their attention and holds their interest. An examination of twelve lyrics by well-known writers brought to light the fact that, exclusive of names, just two words, *memories* and *veranda*, contain more than two syllables.

Words that suggest morbidness, or that leave a feeling of depression, should be avoided. In referring to a sweetheart who has passed to the world beyond, you can do much better than to say that she is buried in the cemetery. Here is where the use of figurative phrasing becomes an art and softens the thought. An experienced lyrist would refer to her as sleeping in a churchyard or on the hillside. No one will misinterpret the metaphor.

Several manuscripts that came to the author's attention said that the boy in the story wiped away the tears from his mother's cheeks. Now, *wipe* is a good word in its proper place, and while it meant just what the writers had in mind, they would have softened the lines and increased the sentiment by substituting *brushed* or *kissed*. Of course, it is true that few actually kiss tears away in real life, but as such an act is probable, it is just as well to use the phrase. *Wipe* is too prosaic and has a tendency to make one think of the wiping of a table or dishes. Certain words, owing to their connections with various phases of domestic environment, lose their song-value. *Work*, for instance, fits in with a song like "Everybody Works but Father," but in a sentimental song on the order of "Down on the Farm" it would be out of place. Raymond Browne, when writing the lyric of the farm song, substituted *toil*.

In a short-story a fictionist would not hesitate to refer to a bleeding heart, but the song writer would not take such a liberty, as he well knows that the mention of blood is repellant. The lyrist would use *aching*, *sighing*, or *broken* as the adjective.

They were walking by the river, is perfectly correct, simple, and to the point, yet a lyric writer would undoubtedly prefer to say *roaming*, *strolling*, or *wandering*. Each present participle indicates practically the same thing, but *walking* is flat and unromantic.

Beginners unskilled in the suggestive method attempt to describe everything that is supposed to have taken place in the story, and in this way introduce material that

is not only unpleasant, but that does not belong in the lyric. In a war song, for example, no trained writer ever thinks of depicting the actual sufferings of soldiers. He idealizes war and weaves a glamour around the incidents or situations.

To illustrate the proper way to handle death in a war song, "A Little Boy in Blue," by Raymond Browne, may be cited. Browne tells of a gray-haired mother gazing at two pictures of her only son, one showing him as a child playing with tin soldiers, and the other in his uniform as he marched away; and to use the author's words: "She said good-by, alas forevermore."

Browne does not name death or battle, still the reader knows that the boy has fallen in the fray. You glean all from the statement that she has seen him for the last time. The tyro would have been tempted to use the first verse to tell of the battle and the boy's actual death.

The late Paul Dresser was very skilful in applying the suggestive method. In his chorus of the "Blue and Gray," he informs you, by using four or five words, that two brothers fought and died in the Civil War, that both wore Confederate uniforms; and then, by slipping in *Santiago*, he transports your mind to the Spanish-American War and makes you acquainted with the fact that the third brother fell in battle and was laid to rest there. *Lies*, *sleeps*, and *laid away* are what he uses instead of *buried*.

To secure proper rhymes and preserve the rhythm inverted phrases are frequently brought into play; but writers should guard against clumsy construction and difficult enunciation.

Transposition of words is sometimes necessary to procure an easy transition from verse to chorus. There is a limit to this method, however, but some beginners do not appear to realize it.

Stereotyped phrases should be discarded. Nothing grates on a publisher's mind more than a song containing hackneyed phrases; and nothing pleases him more than freshness and originality. If you find yourself at a loss for a suitable line, put the work aside for the time being, instead of borrowing from another.

A slight change in the wording of a line may make all the difference in the world. A new writer with a line like "You pinned a rare rose upon my breast" would not be likely to see room for improvement. Had the author of the song in which it appears transposed, used it in the original form, which is grammatically correct, he would not have been able to sustain his rhythm in the "Tulip and the Rose." To preserve his rhythm and give the line the proper lilt he changed it to read: "Upon my breast you pinned a rose so rare."

Euphony results from an unbroken flow of harmonious words, hence, harsh-sounding words, and those that end abruptly, destroy euphony. The effect that a word will have on rhythm or euphony depends upon its position in the line. A word like *broke* at the end of a line will produce a bad effect, whereas in the middle of a line where there is no call for stress, it will not be noticed. A lyric published recently contains a line with this word—"You broke my heart to pass the time away." For the sake of comparison the line may be transposed to read: "To

pass the time away my heart you broke." The word would, at the end of the line, be flat and jarring. In the middle of the line it loses its bad features. No experienced writer would be guilty of placing it at the end, but amateurs do far worse.

If a writer is not gifted with a sense of nice phrasing he will have trouble with his construction until time and practice have taught him the various shadings and correct placings of words.

Every once in a while an article appears in a magazine advising writers to end all lines with open vowels. An open vowel is always preferable when practicable, but there are times when the use of one is out of the question, and it is for the writer to decide whether he shall weaken his line or sentiment for the sake of an open vowel.

In good lyrics, the lines approximately always end with a word that will admit of a hold, or a rest. Every line need not complete a sentence or a clause, but each, as a rule, should furnish a complete idea. *On a summer day in the month of May*, completes a line, affords a rest, conveys something definite to the reader, and yet the sentence is incomplete until the following line, *a lad met a lassie fair*, has been added. Here again, a word out of its natural order saves the rhythm. In prose, *fair* would precede *lassie*. *Fair* affords an opportunity for a rest, is an easy word for rhyming, and sings well and resonantly on a hold.

Monosyllables ending in the sounds of K, P, and T, are unsuitable for line-endings. Note the difference in the lilt secured by changing the position of *top*. "*In*

dreams I wander back to a mountain top"—"*In dreams back to a mountain top I wander.*" To use *top* at the finish makes it sound as if some one had clapped a hand over the speaker's mouth. Sing the word *air*, and then the word *top*, and note the difference.

The examples cited in the foregoing paragraphs are offered to show the good results that may be obtained by a little time and thought. Hundreds of others could be given but they would consume too much space, and if one cannot derive some benefit from those given, he would be no better off with a thousand more. Each must use his own thinking powers and initiative. The reader should not presume that all more or less successful lyric writers are capable of invariably selecting the right word for the right place. Writers like Al. Bryan, Andrew Sterling, Ballard McDonald, Raymond Browne, Jack Mahoney, and a few others, are first-class lyrists, and it is the work of these authors that the novice should study in order to turn out salable songs.

CHAPTER XIV

LYRIC CONSTRUCTION—POINT OF VIEW

1. Syntax

The majority of popular songs are written in the first person, not as the result of any established rule, but very likely owing to the fact that it is easier for the average person to express his own experiences and emotions than to describe similar things in others. Further, as song writers are just plain human beings it is natural for them to picture themselves as the leading characters in their stories, especially in love songs. Experienced lyrists have no difficulty in handling the *person* in songs, for they know just how they wish to present the idea before they begin.

A novice often changes *person* and *tense* because he writes at random, without having so much as a nucleus for an idea. He starts by stringing phrases together, hoping that by the time he has penned six or eight lines, something in the form of a title or an idea will have suggested itself for his chorus; and if nothing appears he continues to ramble through the chorus aimlessly, still praying for a title line suitable for tacking on to the end of his chorus. Naturally, the mass of lines is devoid of sense and sentiment, thought and order. He scouts the suggestion that there is such a thing as careful preparation of a popular song based on a definite idea and worked out according to a well-considered plan.

This is the quality of material that pours into publishers' offices—and seldom remains more than a day or two. Publishers glance at the stuff despairingly. The other day one of the most successful popular-song publishers in the country, a man who retains the best and highest-priced staff of writers, said that while he is ever ready to talk business with any new writer sending in material through the mails, he has never been fortunate enough to have anything of value come to him through that channel. "Perhaps," he added, "other firms may be more fortunate in this respect, as I have heard of several occasions where other men have dug gems out of the mails, but I have had no such luck. I see nothing but hackneyed titles and themes, and cheap imitations of former hits."

The *first person* may be used from the beginning to the end of a song. In many instances it appears in the title, either in the nominative or the possessive case. "The Tulip and the Rose" is a good example wherein the first person is retained in the verse and the chorus. To keep it in both verse and chorus looks like the inevitable, yet some new writers jumble matters by using the third instead of the first in either the one or the other.

In some songs the author talks until he reaches the chorus, when he stops to allow another character to take up the conversation. The type of the story has a great deal to do with the *shift in person.* The trained writer knows when to make it and yet present a logical story, whereas the novice, lacking in practice, minces matters and breaks the sequence. Where a writer steps aside at

the beginning of the chorus, he usually ends his verse with a line that calls for a colon.

In "Put on Your Old Grey Bonnet" the story is in the third person, yet during the development of the story the author allows both characters to speak by quoting their words:

> On the old farm-house veranda
> There sat Silas and Miranda,
> Thinking of the days gone by.

Had the author intruded some of his own conversation he would in all probability have robbed the story of much of its rustic charm. An amateur could have killed most of the sentiment by starting as follows: "I saw a grey-haired couple seated on a rustic porch," or something to this effect, as amateurs do time and again.

The first person appears in all songs in which the author soliloquizes. The author sings to space, unfolding some definite idea as he goes along. Howard's, "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now," is a song on this order.

The point to be emphasized is that new writers should be consistent with the *person* in lyrics. Changes are allowable, but they must be logical and plausible. Careful regard must be had for any shifts between the end of the verse and the beginning of the chorus so that the transition—treated in an earlier chapter—may be natural, easy and absolutely clear.

2. Gender

A semi-high-class lyric in which the gender is left in

doubt enables a man or a woman to assume the rôle of the leading character, and carries a stronger appeal. "Last Night Was the End of the World" is a capital illustration. Some writers deliberately aim to create this style of ballad, while others accomplish the same result unconsciously. "Memories," by Brett Page and Sol Levy, is another striking example of this type. In this song you will see that neither man nor maid is mentioned, but two phrases give you a clue to the gender of the singer—for instance, the first line of the second verse: while reading or singing this line you instinctively visualize a woman being enfolded in the arms of a man, rather than the opposite; and yet, thousands of men have been clasped in women's arms, and this allows the woman to put herself in the singer's place.

The concealing of gender, or making it obscure, is best suited to the semi-high-class ballads. Ordinarily the gender should be made plain as soon as possible in the story—let the audience know the gender as quickly as you can. A girl likes to sing a song that has a man for a "lead," even though the story contains heartaches for the girl. A name, a pronoun, or the drift of the speaker's conversation, will suffice in most cases to establish gender.

3. Poetic License

Poetic license allows for a certain amount of laxity in sentence structure, but it does not, as some writers think, permit deliberate and glaring errors in grammar. The use of the past participle for the past tense, a singular

subject with a plural predicate, or placing the nominative pronoun in the objective or the possessive case, is not allowed in any form of poetry or prose, unless within quotations, indicating that some character is talking.

Words that are seldom used in straight prose are found in poetry and are available for song lyrics—*'mid*, *'til*, *'twas*, *'neath*, are examples. *Don't* for *doesn't* is often used by lyrists who do not know the difference. To them, the former indicates simply the negative form and sustains the rhythm of the line. The double negative is another favorite with the tyro. *Shall* and *will* are looked upon as being interchangeable, and most of the lyric writers maintain these words have a common level according to the liberties allowed by poetic license. It is true that *shall* is a poor singing word and ordinarily would make a line in a love song stilted.

New writers should be careful as to how they shift the tenses. A song may be written in one tense, or in more than one, but there should be a logical reason for making the shift. The shifting of tenses and the changing of the point of view tend to weaken the story interest. The main thing is to make yourself clear and have the story or idea unfold in a natural manner.

CHAPTER XV

MELODY CONSTRUCTION

1. How Melodies Come

One does not have to be a finished musician to be able to write popular tunes. Of course, if one is thoroughly familiar with the technique of music and its construction, the knowledge should not prove a hindrance. Music, or the ability to create music, is born in some, and the proof is the fact that many of the successful melody writers are not competent players or even theorists. Some can pick out a tune with one finger, while others, unable to tell the difference between any two notes on a piano, have to hum their melodies to an arranger. The average person cannot understand how a man unable to play can compose tunes that will set the whole country singing and whistling, but the fact is they can and do.

Just how they do it is rather difficult to say. Very likely, tunes flit through their heads as thoughts do through any normal brain. Ask a non-playing composer how he wrote such and such a melody and he will shrug his shoulders and say: "I don't know. It just came to me while I was riding in a car."

Tunes seek him out, and when he hears one that strikes his fancy he continues to hum it until he has developed the original strain. Later he may make alterations, or he may discard the entire melody for something better

that has suggested itself. Then again, he may take several tunes and blend the best parts of each. Perhaps when he has completed a melody he cannot tell you what the other part sounded like—they have gone back to their original sources and will come back in another form.

The mechanical melody-writer places more faith in his favorite instrument, usually a piano. He sits at the piano improvising strains until he discovers one that appears to have that haunting jingle or motive. The lyric in front of him may offer some suggestions, but before he attempts to do anything, he first becomes familiar with the meter, rhythm, and sentiment of the lyric. Then from time to time he tries to hit upon an opening strain for the chorus.

When a melody writer finds himself unable to pick out a suitable opening strain he is not averse to calling in the lyric writer for suggestions. Should their combined efforts fail to produce anything of value, the lyric writer may take his lyric to another composer, but as a rule, when two have been working together for any length of time they manage to turn out some sort of melody between them. In a last desperate effort they are likely to resort to songs that have been hits in the past.

There is another type of the popular composer, the man who can whistle new tunes as he goes along, jotting the notes down on paper the second they leave his lips. In setting music to a lyric he will whistle line after line to his collaborator until the pair agree on some particular strain. A man of this sort, however, has to know a good deal about music.

The finished musician who tries to write popular music

by note rarely makes a success of it. His music is too stiff and foreign to the ear of the masses, though it is technically correct—and in the latter fact he appears to find a great deal of pleasure. After he has made several unsuccessful attempts he gives it up as a bad job, declaring that he would rather starve and turn out musical gems than live in opulence and create "rot." Very often his hearers are a bit skeptical about his sincerity, and become convinced that he is shamming when he borrows a five dollar bill from the man who does not know G sharp from B flat.

At the bottom of the list of composers comes the man who knows absolutely nothing about composing; that is to say, he has not an iota of creative ability, and he glories in the fact. His method is to purloin the pretty strains from former hits, blend them, and then offer them in their entirety as an original composition. And when he finishes with his work one has difficulty in telling from whence they came. He changes tempo, substitutes a note here and there, uses a strain or a bar from another man's verse for his chorus, and in this manner produces something for which the public is willing to pay. Regardless of the methods employed, the product is hailed as an original composition, which unknown to the public has been patched together to meet a transitory demand.

Does the so-called composer worry? If you could see him when he smiles at his fat royalty check you would not think he does. If you were to question his system he would be likely to tell you that he believes in working along the lines of least resistance, and in giving the public something

that it can memorize quickly, and a strange, entirely new tune would not answer for the purpose.

2. *Important Qualities*

A popular tune to become really popular must be simple —easy to play, and easy to sing. The fact has been stated before, but emphasis will not do the newcomer any injury. The average pianist likes a song that she can play and sing at sight. If the range is beyond her vocal powers she will not care much for it. The girl of ordinary playing ability prefers a simple bass, and the wise arranger bears this in mind when making the accompaniment.

The majority of performers cannot do justice to a song that goes beyond an octave in range—a fact which the arranger knows from experience. This is the chief reason why composers aim to keep melodies within the octave, or within an octave and a note, for unless the rank and file of singers use the song it will not stand much chance of being heard by the public. From the very conception of the song-idea the lyrist and composer are guided by commercial motives.

Now one may confine a melody to an octave and yet turn out a weird collection of notes, resembling anything but real melody. Long and frequent jumps will bring about this condition. Jumping back and forth is no indication of originality, any more than is monotonous repetition. Whether you move forward or backward, try to build by easy stages. All successful writers appear to follow this course. Many of the greatest hits ever pub-

lished—that is to say, the choruses—were a combination of re-vamps founded on the same notes. An idea of the similarity can be gleaned from the following opening notes:

"Kentucky Days"—D, E flat, E natural, F.
"Ragtime Soldier Man"—D, E flat, E natural, F.
"Rose of the Mountain Trail"—D, E flat, F, E, F.
"Silver Threads"—D, E flat, D.
"Sweet Elaine"—D, E flat, D, C.
"Summertime"—D, E flat, F.
"Trail of the Lonesome Pine"—D, C, B flat.
"Suwanee River"—D, C, B flat.
"Down on the Farm"—D, E flat, F, F.
"Long Way To Tipperary"—D, E flat, F, F, F, G.

Scores of others could be cited that open on the same strain, which appears to indicate that composers have come to the conclusion that songs opening with this scheme stand a better chance of success than those starting with other combinations. This combination has furrowed its way into the minds of lovers of popular music, and as soon as they hear it in a supposedly new tune they take to it immediately, little dreaming that they have been singing the same tune year in and year out in other guises. In most instances the time allotted to the several notes furnishes the only real variation in the opening.

Perhaps the melody writer selects D, as it admits of an easy run upwards and marks the low singing pitch in the average voice. The moment a person hears this strain he falls in with it. He catches on instantly, and from time to time it comes back, suggesting the other

following strains less known to him. Thus the composer leads the public from the relatively known to the relatively unknown. Having rememorized the old strain in its new order, the music buyer tries from time to time to catch the succeeding notes, and keeps humming until he has the entire chorus tucked away in his brain. A long jump following the opening scheme may prove fatal to success.

Simplicity and reminiscence are used in the chorus as a bait. The song writer knows that once a person takes to the chorus he is likely to want the entire song—provided, of course, that the verse has proved attractive as well.

In former years repetition in rustic ballads was looked upon almost as a formula. The third line was a repetition of the first. In the fifth there appeared a change, but the opening strain reappeared in the seventh line. As a rule, the chorus displayed repetition in the first and third lines.

Beginners often make the mistake of using the same note five and six times in succession, which produces a monotonous effect. Experienced composers occasionally resort to this method, but they can offset the tiresome monotony by knowing how to follow up the repetition with contrasting variety.

3. Reminiscent Melodies

As has been said, some composers deliberately confiscate strains from former hits, and others do so unconsciously. The man who makes a practice of this device usually changes the tempo in order to conceal the theft. Although

the law allows him to pilfer to a certain extent, he does not care to have his "steal" be an ovious one, as he fears it might hold him up to ridicule and influence a publisher's mind. Very often these disguised "steals," as they are called, are not detected by the other song writers, and seldom by the general public.

The man who takes from other melodies, and does so without any intention, can scarcely be censured, when one realizes the small field—one octave—from which he may draw material. And in justice to the composer who does infringe unknowingly, it may be said that there is scarcely a song that becomes popular part of which cannot be traced to some other song; in fact, those that never become popular are just as reminiscent of other songs as are the popular hits. The reasons for the musical pirate's method have already been given.

There are times when a scrupulous composer turns out a very pretty melody, and then discovers that he has used part of another song. Perhaps the troublesome strain is the punch-line in his chorus, and rather than break up a good chorus he will let it stand, hoping it will pass without being detected. Composers do not like to be accused of taking from their fellow writers, as such an accusation insinuates a lack of originality, or a weakening of creative ability. On some occasions, when at a loss for a good strain, a composer will utilize a number of bars which appeared in some of his former hits. But even here he aims to conceal the source of the borrowed strains, as performers object at times to using one song that is reminiscent of another.

How many persons would associate "Nearer My God To Thee" with "Good-by My Blue Bell"? It is within reason to assume that Morse never dreamed that he was encroaching upon the well-known hymn. The association of ideas—or its absence—has a great deal to do with keeping the similarity recondite. If one were to use the same strain in the music of another hymn, nine persons out of ten would be likely to see the similitude. Wedded to a line in a war story, the strain practically defies detection.

According to a story that has traveled up and down Broadway, Vincent Bryan, a former collaborator of Harry Von Tilzer, declared that he could take the entire chorus of an old song, change the rhythm and meter, apply it to a new lyric, and "get away with it." To prove that he knew what he was talking about he selected the chorus of "Annie Rooney," wrote the chorus for a song called, "Somewhere Somebody's Waiting," then took his lyric and the music of the chorus of "Annie Rooney" to a composer and asked the latter to write a melody for the verse. The composer played over the chorus and looked up at Bryan in surprise, saying:

"You've got the entire chorus of 'Annie Rooney' here."

Bryan smiled and nodded. "I know it," he said. "But what of it?"

"What of it? You'll never get away with anything like that!"

"Why not? Nine-tenths of the performers in the business today never heard 'Annie Rooney,' and the other tenth won't recognize her in her new dress. Furthermore, the little girls buying sheet music today don't know that

Annie ever existed. You just go ahead and put a melody to the verse and I'll do the rest."

The composer finally did as he was asked, and when the song came out it proved to be one of the season's hits. The public did not detect the ruse, and few performers ever discovered that they were singing an old-time favorite.

Another composer tried to do this with one of his own hits, but he met with little success, as hundreds of performers discovered the trick and refused to put the song on.

Of course it is puerile for one to think that a catchy strain taken from another song will insure success, and no one knows this better than the experienced writer. A song that meets with public approval is like a good personality, each consisting of a certain number of ingredients, with each ingredient as important as another—it is the combination that produces individuality.

When borrowed themes and strains became a part of the music business, the melody writers had recourse to the old-time songs, such as "Suwanee River," "Dixie," "Old Black Joe," and others. Composers took the strains without making any attempt to conceal them, very often relying upon the fond recollections linked with them as a means of securing a punch. In time, however, the old favorites became worn and the song makers were obliged to seek new fields. The success attained from the use of bygone tunes may have set some fellow with a psychological turn of mind to pondering over the value of working from the relatively known to the relatively unknown.

Irving Berlin probably gave some thought to this method when he took Mendelssohn's "Spring Song" and cut it up into the raggiest of "rags."

Will D. Cobb, author of "Good-bye, Dolly Gray," and a score of other hits, occasionally relates how he secured a punch-strain for his "Good-bye, Little Girl, Good-bye."

"We needed a good strain for our punch-line in the chorus," he says when telling the story, "which was, 'In my uniform of blue I'll come marching back to you,' but we could not think of an original line that suited. So we conned over a number of songs and finally came to 'Mr. Johnson, Turn Me Loose.' The opening line in the chorus just dovetailed with our line and we took it. Then as a finish we used a line from a semi-high-class ballad that was popular at the time, and incidentally turned out a march-ballad hit."

If one has the time and inclination he may compare "California and You" with "Ben Bolt," and "Little House Upon the Hill" with "Home Sweet Home."

Dozens of others could be mentioned, but as the listing of names would be of no additional value to the reader, it is just as well to leave the list unprinted. While commenting upon the similarity in songs the author has no desire to censure, condemn, or accuse any one of wilful wrong doing, nor to cast any reflection on the creative ability of the composers. His object is to state facts as he has found them, to repeat what has been credibly told to him, and to allow the reader and the public to judge for themselves.

New writers are neither warned against the using of old

strains, nor advised to incorporate them in their compositions. Each must follow the dictates of his own conscience, never losing sight of the fact, however, that originality is something that always receives a "glad hand" from the publisher and a welcome from the public

CHAPTER XVI

COLLABORATION

Collaboration in popular-song writing appears to be the rule rather than the exception. The writing of lyrics is an art in itself, as well as the composing of music, and each demands special attention for proper development. Irving Berlin writes both words and music for most of his songs, but many look upon him as a genius, and a genius is expected to excel the ordinary mortal; but if he is a genius in this respect, what name or title would one confer upon Anita Owen, who writes her own lyrics, melodies, and piano scores? She does not compose ragtime, but hits nevertheless.

When two writers collaborate they usually share the profits equally. Sometimes three and four have a hand in the construction of a song, and the division of the financial returns is settled among themselves. A lyrist may be unable to write a suitable second verse, in which case he pays another ten or fifteen dollars to do it. One man may unearth a good title and theme, another may write the lyric, and a melody may be pieced together by two composers.

A composer may purchase a set of lyrics outright, write melodies, and then place the songs on royalty, in which case the lyric writer would not share in any of the royalties. When a song is placed with a publisher, each man holding an interest in it receives a separate contract, and any of

the writers is entitled to dispose of his contract to suit his own wishes. He may even sell the contract back to the publisher.

In the long run, collaboration is beneficial, for it means added energy and prestige behind the song. A writer having faith in his song will do all in his power to induce performers to use it, and it is much better to have two writers working for the success of a song. Ten years ago few writers paid any attention to the exploitation of their products, feeling that they had done their share in the writing, and the remainder of the work should be done by the publisher. Nowadays the wise lyrist and composer help push their own products.

To collaborate with a staff writer means that your songs will receive proper consideration when performers visit the publishers in search of fresh material. Every man is anxious to see his own work pushed to the front, and if you are an outsider you can scarcely ask the staff writer to give your songs the preference. In fact, unless the staff man has special instructions to push your song he is apt to forget all about it. One firm made a practice of posting a notice in the house listing the numbers that should be given special attention.

A publisher cannot stand behind his "pluggers" to make sure that each song is alloted equal consideration. He is after hits, and whichever song shows the most promise will come in for first call. Being aware of these conditions the experienced writer tries to place all his songs with one firm and then makes the publisher's office his headquarters. Some of the writers act as "pluggers"—

those who sing new songs in public places like cabarets and department stores.

A new writer has no sinecure in persuading a staff-man to collaborate with him, unless he can offer something far out of the ordinary. If a staff writer is under contract he cannot "team up" with an outsider without first obtaining the publisher's consent, but the latter will seldom object if he sees anything like a hit in sight. Occasionally a new man will sell a lyric to a publisher, who will then turn it over to his staff melody writer. Should the song prove to be a winner, the publisher is likely to suggest that the new team take another attempt at writing together.

The majority of lyric writers are also natural melody makers, but they conceal the fact, preferring to take chances of procuring a good start by allowing some staff man to write the music. It is a common occurence for a melody writer to seek suggestions from his partner, and very often the lyrist writes the music of the entire chorus. A wise team never haggles over a line or a strain. They are "out after the money," and if one man can improve the other's work, so much the better.

The real melody writer is not a manufactured product, neither is the genuine lyrist. If you can write good lyrics and do not live near the big publishers, you may, by careful canvassing, discover a natural-born melody writer at home. Most of them hail from any place but the big towns. Of course, if none is within reach you have the alternative of submitting your work through the mail. If your lyric should strike the fancy of a publisher he will see to the music end of it.

Do not get the idea that any one competent to play an instrument is capable of writing popular tunes, and for the sake of seeing your lyric set to music do not attempt to make a melody writer out of a fourth-rate pianist or fiddler. And do not scorn a man who maintains that he is able to write music, even though he is not musician enough to play a jew's-harp.

There is no fixed way by which a beginner may secure proper collaboration. Each must work out his own success, and always be alert to grasp opportunities when they chance to cross his path.

CHAPTER XVII

SONG-HITS AND SONG-CYCLES

1. The Song-Hit

The word "hit," in popular-song parlance, as will be readily seen, means a song that attains a certain amount of popularity, and one that reimburses the publisher for his time, labor, and financial investment.

The general conception of a hit is any song that is heard on the streets. Some songs that become well known are actually failures. For instance, a publisher with a fat bank account and poor business judgment may spend more on a song than it brings in; and this may occur even when a song sells several hundred thousand copies. It is the result of a purblind publisher's trying to force a song on the public.

About ten years ago a well-known publisher selected what he deemed to be a "sure-fire" hit and began an advertising campaign with the object of making a "world beater" out of the song. He was alone in his views as to the song's chances of success, and his closest advisers and friends argued in vain trying to make him see matters in the proper light.

"You fellows think you know everything about the song business," he retorted one afternoon. "Well, I'm going to prove to you that you don't know the difference between a popular hit and a hymn."

He took up the song, more determined than ever to land a "winner," and spent money right and left. He managed to force something like forty thousand copies over the counters, but he lost close to eleven thousand dollars as a result.

Song-hits are divided into national hits and local hits. Both of these may be subdivided into natural, freak, and stage-hits.

The natural hit, strictly speaking, is a song that could be made popular by any up-to-date publisher. Under the natural hit comes what might be termed an ordinary hit, a song that is fairly meritorious, but which requires a large sum and systematic "plugging" behind it to "put it over." Additional comment will be made on the natural hit later on, and the freak and the stage hit will also be taken up presently.

A national hit is one that becomes popular all over the country, whereas a local hit's popularity is confined to a certain part of the country, usually that locality in which the song has been published. Some songs that become very popular in the East are never heard of in the central West or on the Pacific coast, and the same thing in reverse applies to songs that are issued in Chicago or in San Francisco. It is not uncommon for a song to be popular in Philadelphia or Boston and be practically unknown in New York. A song issued in New York that becomes locally popular, and whose popularity extends to adjacent cities, such as Brooklyn, Jersey City, Hoboken, and on Long Island, would not meet with much difficulty in finding buyers for at least one hundred thousand copies.

However, a publisher may lose the profits from a local hit by gambling heavily on the chances of securing a national hit. He may find, for instance, that certain elements of the population do not fancy his song. Again, the nature of the theme not infrequently has a great deal to do with limiting the popularity of a song. A young woman living in a small town in Michigan, one who had never read or heard of Rip Van Winkle, would not get half as much enjoyment out of "Rip Van Winkle Was a Lucky Man" as one who was familiar with Washington Irving's story. The same holds true of a girl who had never heard of the real Broadway, or who had no conception of the Gay White Way, in connection with a song like "When Broadway Was a Pasture." But if you sing to her about an old mill stream, or a lonesome pine tree, she can substitute the mill or the tree where she has often waited for her own sweetheart.

A national hit is one that appeals to the average person and becomes popular all over the country as a result of proper handling, together with more or less merit. A local hit may have just as much merit, but owing to the limited amount of funds behind it, or the lack of experience on the part of the publisher, the song must stop with local popularity. A small publisher may have a good song that is in demand, but if the big department stores and some of the syndicates hold him up on payments he may be forced to curtail his advertising and general exploitation. Once a publisher starts to popularize a song he must keep at it until he "lands a winner" or comes to the conclusion that the song is a failure. While performers are hammer-

ing the song into the public's ear is the time for the publisher to reap his harvest, and if he is without capital to supply copies he will not derive much profit. Performers do not care to use the same song two seasons.

But to return to the natural hit. Now, a natural hit is one that makes an impression on nine out of every ten persons that hear it, performers or non-performers, yet in spite of all its good qualities a natural hit may never become any kind of hit owing to lack of funds behind it. Twenty years ago a natural hit would become popular on its intrinsic merit, but today publishers have to pay singers to use a natural hit in the same way as they do with an ordinary hit, or a song that has no chance of ever becoming a hit. The practice of paying performers to sing songs has become so widely prevalent that few professionals care to use a number unless the publisher sees his way clear to pay sums ranging from five to fifty dollars a week.

"The Trail of the Lonesome Pine" was a natural hit, with a live publisher back of it who had access to the big syndicates. But once the song got a start nothing could stop it. According to reliable reports, the song reached the two million mark. Now a small publisher with little or no capital might not have been able to sell more than ten thousand copies, especially if the big stores and syndicates had refused to list the number.

A natural hit does not necessarily have to be a ballad, but it appears that the majority of natural hits are ballads. During 1915 one of the most natural hits ever published was brought out by a small publisher. Performers went into ecstasy over it. Every girl who heard it just raised

her eyes and said: "That's a beautiful song!" Several minstrel shows featured the song, and hundreds of persons wrote to the publisher for copies, always enclosing the price. They said that they had asked for the song at the five- and ten-cent stores but were told that it had not been listed. Had the song been the property of some big publisher it would have been one of the biggest sellers ever known, and yet the publisher went out of business without having disposed of more than five thousand copies. In the first place, his bank account did not permit him to buy up the services of singers on the "big time," and secondly, he could not interest the syndicates and jobbers.

The ordinary hit has to be drummed into the public's ears for months, and hundreds of performers, big and small, must be using it at the same time. The song as a whole may be good, but it lacks that intangible and alluring something found in a natural hit. "Down by the Old Mill Stream" was a natural hit, but the publisher had to spend a year on it before he began to enjoy any real profits. How he ever turned it into a hit after such a length of time has always been a bit of a mystery to the song fraternity.

"My Little Dream Girl" is another good example of a song that had to be drummed continually into the public's ear for months. Neither the title nor the story is out of the ordinary, but the lyric has a pleasant swing to it, and there is some variety in the general construction. In addition to this, the song carries a pretty melody. A publisher with a lean bank account would not have made expenses on this song, and yet L. Wolfe Gilbert, by working day and night on it, backed by a wealthy firm, man-

aged to make a million-copy hit of it. Very likely Jos. W. Stern & Co., the publishers, spent more in exploiting Mr. Gilbert's song than they did in former years to make a pair of Max Witt's hits. When one hears a boy on the streets whistling the latest popular craze, he little dreams of the money, time, and energy that have been expended to bring it rippling from the lips of the happy-go-lucky urchin.

A freak hit is one that becomes popular as the result of a series of peculiar circumstances. Take "It's a Long Way To Tipperary," as an illustration. This song was first brought out in England seven or eight years ago. No one paid any attention to it and the publishers came to the conclusion that it was a dead number and shelved it. When the war broke out in Europe, several bands came into possession of the song and used it as a march number. The swing of it made a deep impression on the soldier boy, and before a month had passed every regiment in the country had taken it up. Its fame began to spread all over England and later crossed the Atlantic. Newspapers throughout this country printed columns about it, which started American performers after it. Everybody appeared to be hungry to hear the song. Within a short time one could scarcely go into a theatre without hearing it sung or played, and the publishers, suddenly realizing that they had a "sure-fire" hit, jumped the price to twenty-three and thirty cents a copy, or something like these figures; but the public purchased it just as readily as if it had been selling for ten cents, or even seven. The song received at least a million dollars' worth of free advertising and sold more than two million copies.

"Chinatown," by William Jerome and Jean Schwartz, was another freak hit. This song was issued in 1910 and turned out to be of little account. In 1915 it was revived. Some big performer used it with good effect, which sent the others clamoring for it. Mr. Jerome had practically forgotten the song, and yet six years later he was handed a royalty statement for two hundred thousand copies.

The popular-song business is like a horse race—no one can tell just when a dark horse will draw away from the bunch and show daylight between himself and his fighting rivals. And the favorite is similar to the song that has been primed and set, only to be left at the post. Verily does the perspiring publisher frequently say: "It certainly is a gamble!"

2. The Song-Cycle

In the parlance of the high-class song a cycle of songs is a series, generally by one composer, circling around a central theme—as a cycle of love-songs. But when we speak of a song-cycle in the popular-song world we mean a certain type of song which has become a "rage."

Popular songs come and go in cycles. Some cycles last longer, and enjoy more popularity, than others. At the present writing, a cycle of mother-songs is holding the center of the musical stage. Al. Bryan started it with "I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier." A few years back L. Wolfe Gilbert ushered in a cycle of plantation songs with his "Mammy's Shufflin' Dance," and Ballard McDonald

paved the way for another cycle—of rustic ballads—with his "Trail of the Lonesome Pine."

Every song that becomes a hit does not start a cycle, even though it be unlike the prevailing—and possibly the waning—cycle. Writers and publishers lose no time in trying to make the new hit the inception of a new fashion in songs, but at times they discover that the public does not care for any more of the same kind.

New writers make a mistake in trying to dispose of a cycle song just about the time that a cycle is on the wane, and the reason for this mistaken effort is that they do not pay enough attention to the doings of the publishers and the theatrical world. If you are not clever enough to start a new cycle, follow the leader as soon as you see he has started one. Of course, the mere fact that you keep abreast of the cycle will not guarantee success, for not one song in ten becomes popular. But you must take your chances.

Writers and publishers know from experience that the market will "stand for" just so many hits at a time; nevertheless, they all gamble their brains and money on catching the public fancy. The best song in a cycle does not always meet with success, as a great deal depends upon the way a song is handled and the amount of capital behind it. Leo Feist, for example, has brought the popularizing of songs down to such a science that he could turn another publisher's failure into a national hit. Mr. Feist, however, is very fortunate in having as a manager, Ed. F. Bitner, who is a genius in selecting and exploiting songs.

During the recent skirmishes with Mexico several pub-

lishers attempted to force a war-cycle on the public, and one firm lost a small fortune in the venture. The public was not in a mood for war songs. Its patriotism had not been aroused to such a degree that it desired to sing of soldier boys leaving their sweethearts, and it had not dropped so low that it could approve of its patriotic ideals being served up in ragtime welded to the cheapest kind of sentiment.

In an effort to sound the possibilities for a new cycle two collaborators will put their heads together. Jack will say:

"Everybody's grinding out mother-songs now, Tom, and I think it would be a good idea if we switched to some theme that the public hasn't had in years."

"That's a good idea—how about a kid-story song? We haven't had a good one in years."

"Something to that, Tom; but say, what do you think of one on the style of 'Little Black Me,' or 'Honey, Stay in Your Own Back Yard?'"

"Don't you think that would be a little too slow for the crowd now? They all want tangoes, or fast stuff."

"Just the thing, Tom. The public is probably sick of tangoes and doesn't know it. They will grab it just for a change. Besides, we'd have to put almost any kid-song in waltz time. Let's chance it."

The writers in their efforts to land a winner may select one of a dozen themes that have not been used in recent cycles.

CHAPTER XVIII

MANUSCRIPTS AND MARKETS

1. The Preparation of the Manuscript

Writers who have to depend upon the mails to secure a hearing for their songs will do well to have a complete copy of the song made, words, music, and piano accompaniment. It is unlikely that the publisher will use your piano arrangement, but it will prevent some tired pianist from butchering the melody while trying to "fake" a bass for the melody. A few "blue" notes may have a tendency to spoil the entire effect. And it is wise to send along an extra set of typewritten words for the publisher to read while the pianist is playing the song. Use pen and ink, not a lead pencil, when preparing the manuscript, and write legibly.

In case you cannot obtain a suitable accompaniment you may send your lyric in with a "lead" sheet—just the plain melody, which in most cases will give the publisher a clear idea of your work. Do not entrust the writing of the accompaniment to the leader of the village band. He may be a fine musician, but possess no ideas as to simple harmony; and he may try to persuade you to make changes in the melody that would prove fatal.

2. Marketing a Manuscript

If you live in a city where there are one or more

publishers you might be able to obtain a personal audience. Should the publisher tell you he is too busy and ask you to leave the script, you have no alternative, as the average publisher of today has a great many more worries besides those of looking over manuscripts when offered. Pat Howley makes a practice of examining manuscripts in the morning before the theatrical performers begin to arrive. Leo Feist has a board of directors that passes upon all compositions submitted to the firm.

Manuscripts may be sent in flat or in a tube. In writing to the publisher simply say in a *short* letter that you are offering your work for his consideration, either for outright sale or on a royalty basis. Refrain from trying to make him familiar with your family history, your reasons for submitting the manuscript to him, and your motive for taking up song writing. His interest does not extend beyond the possible commercial value of your songs.

Separate lyrics may be submitted, for approximately every publisher is ready to talk business with you if you have something new to offer, be it a complete song, a separate lyric, or just an original title. If you happen to know the name of a staff composer you might send your lyric to him, and should it be really meritorious he would either offer to buy it from you, or try to interest his publisher. Melody writers are just as much on the alert for new ideas and good lyrics as are the publishers.

Do not offer your work gratis, for if it is worth printing and exploiting it is worth paying for. Do not tell a publisher that your local dealer will take a hundred copies

if he will issue the song. A publisher has to sell many thousands of copies before he ever sees a cent of profit, and if he did not think that your song would appeal to the average person, you could not induce a large publisher to put it out if your dealer agreed to take five thousand copies, though if you could guarantee a small publisher a sale of several thousand copies he might take a chance.

When sending in a manuscript abstain from telling the publisher that your song was well received at a local concert. Friends have a habit of applauding everything done by a "native son." And do not try to convince him that the portrait of a moving picture "queen" should make a hit of your song. He has been told that so often that it has become a thorn in his side. Do not send in mimeographed copies nor printed copies that have been brought out by some song shark. The live publisher is looking for original material, and he does not like the idea of accepting a song that has been sent to dozens of others at the same time.

There is no necessity for you to copyright your song. The publisher will attend to this matter. He will not steal it. If he likes your song he will buy it, provided you do business with him in a business-like manner

3. The Proper Attitude for Beginners

The beginner should not expect the same compensation for his songs as that accorded to the recognized writer, nor should he build air castles from his fancied royalties,

for he may have to write a dozen songs before he ever sees anything that looks like a real royalty statement. Very likely he will have to sell his songs outright at the start, but he should be willing to make sacrifices to obtain a foothold in the business. He has everything to gain, and really nothing to lose.

Of course, it is possible that the beginner may find a publisher willing to pay him a royalty, and when he does, he may consider himself fortunate indeed, for the authentic biographies of the big writers of the past and present show that most of them sold their numbers in the beginning for a few dollars. In commenting upon the financial returns from songs, Al. Piantadosi said:

"The following incident regarding the first song I ever wrote, 'My Mariutch Take a Steamboat' is but typical of the way many song-hits are born. One day I heard a foreigner in New York City tell his companion that his girl had taken a steamer and run away to New Jersey with another fellow. The idea of calling a ferryboat a steamboat struck me as capital material for a song. 'My Mariutch' 'made good' for the publishers, but I got for my efforts only the price of a package of cigarettes. I wrote 'I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier' in thirty minutes, and have already received over $4,000 in royalties —with more to come."

Mr. Piantadosi was more worried about getting a start than he was about fabulous royalties. He had sense enough to know that once he obtained some recognition the rest would be easy. Take royalty if you can get it, but do not hesitate about parting with a song if you can-

not. Very often a publisher will take a chance on a newcomer's song that he is able to buy outright, rather than invest money in one for which he has to pay an advance and royalty to an established writer. Publishers are in the business to make money, and some are sufficiently sagacious to realize that a new writer's song is just as valuable as a veteran's.

A few years ago a young woman who had been selling verse to the various magazines for ten and fifteen dollars came to New York with several song lyrics. One publisher offered her thirty-five dollars for the lot, promised to have music written by a well-known composer, and give her as much publicity as possible. The young lady refused the offer, saying that she would have royalty or nothing. Up to the present time she has never made any progress as a song writer, and in "turning down" the offer lost the best opportunity of her life, for the publisher in all likelihood would have turned out a hit for her and made her name.

4. Various Marketing Methods

You may possess the greatest song ever written and yet fail to find a profitable market for it. A great deal depends on when, how, and where you offer your material. There are tricks to the song writing art, profession, or trade—call it what you will—just as there are tricks in every other line. One man will follow a groove and never sell, even though his goods are of fine quality, whereas another, capable of turning out nothing better than a mediocre brand, will dispose of his entire output.

If you have a good song and cannot dispose of it, there must be something wrong with your marketing methods. The regular way of trying to market is to offer a song to a publisher and accept his decision. Now some publishers do not know a good song when they see one; others are so tied up at times that they have to reject promising numbers; and still others condemn a song today that they will buy next week—moods and changing conditions causing the reversal of their former decisions.

Harry S. Marion, without a doubt, could sell more ordinary songs than any man that every graced music-publishers' row. What some one else could not give away he would sell. Sometimes when he becomes reminiscent he tells of one occasion when he sold a march to F. A. Mills. Mr. Marion had offered the march to every publisher that he knew, including Mr. Mills, who had refused it. The writer put the march in his trunk, and six months later while rummaging through it he came across the march. Being in need of a little ready cash he decided to make another try with Mr. Mills. He changed the title, rushed into the publisher's office with his manuscript and told him that he had a brand new march—a sure-fire hit. Mr. Mills played it over, and according to Harry, said that it certainly was a good instrumental number. Mr. Mills, so it seems, was not particularly "strong for" marches at the time, but offered fifty dollars for this one, and it is needless to say that the offer was accepted.

After Mr. Marion received his check he looked up with a smile and told Mr. Mills how he had "turned down" the march under another title. Mills simply grinned and

shook his head. Whenever Harry offered anything in the future Mills would always ask:

"How many times have I seen this before, Harry?" and Harry was ever ready to declare that he had never showed it to him before.

Harry Marion spent much of his time devising ways and means to sell songs to new publishers, and for years practically every new publisher that entered the field had at least one number in his catalog by Harry S. Marion. How he managed to separate publishers from checks he alone knew, and he seldom shared his secrets with others, for he valued these as much as, if not more than, he did the stack of manuscripts that he always had on hand for new and hopeful publishers.

A practice that was used by a number of writers was to pay some first-class singer to put on a song at a certain theatre, and after giving tickets to about twenty persons, with instructions to applaud the song vigorously, have a publisher visit the theatre to hear the song. As a rule, the publisher, unaware of the presence of the "cappers," "fell for" the ruse and purchased the song, or gave the authors a liberal advance against royalty.

Another plan was to have a well-known performer visit a publisher and rant about the merits of some song written by a friend. The performer's praises would be likely to arouse the curiosity of the publisher, and the latter would eventually end by asking the performer to have the writers come in. These and various other tricks were employed to sell songs.

5. *Prices*

Publishers have no fixed prices for material. They do not care to pay any more than they have to, and they know that new writers are inclined to let songs go at a low figure in order to secure a start in the business. Some are willing to pay a royalty, while others insist on buying everything outright. A new writer should always consider the amount of prestige he will secure from a song as well as the cash. An offer of a hundred dollars outright from a large publisher would be of more value in the long run, perhaps, than a royalty contract from a small publisher. The big publisher may make a hit of a song, and in so doing he "makes" the author, whereas the small publisher may fail to turn out a hit with such a number, and the writer would not only be "out" a certain amount of cash, but he would still be unknown.

However, small publishers are the dark horses of the business, and sometimes turn out a hit when least expected. In fact, about the only way a small firm becomes big is by landing one or more hits.

General advice having to do with the actual selling of a song would be of little value. Each writer must settle this question when the proper time arrives. The new writer stands a better chance today of receiving royalty on his first song than his predecessors did ten years ago. The quality of the work offered and the future possibilities of the writer's value to the publisher will have something to do with the terms proffered.

A dozen years ago popular sheet-music retailed for

twenty-five cents a copy; publishers received about twelve or twelve-and-a-half cents a copy from the jobbers and paid out five cents a copy in royalty, which had to be divided when more than one man had had a part in the writing of the song. As time passed, there was a gradual decline in retail prices, which had the effect of reducing royalty. At the present time popular sheet music sells as low as six cents a copy, retail, and of course songs going at this figure cannot pay a five-cent royalty. The regular price is supposed to be ten cents a copy retail. The prevailing rate of royalty is one cent a copy, on regular piano copies only. Any advance given to a writer is deducted from his first royalty statement; or if he has a drawing account his drawings are taken out before he is handed a check.

Recently several publishers have tried to raise the price of sheet music. They have made the attempt simply because they are not satisfied with the margin of profit they receive from the ten-cent product. They make no effort to improve the quality of the songs, and how they expect the public to pay more is somewhat of a mystery. Taken all in all it looks like poor business judgment. In the first place, by increasing the price they would take the bulk of popular music out of the range of five- and ten-cent stores, which are the very life of the trade; secondly, the public would be very likely to resent any increase in price, having been trained to think of "popular" sheet music as a ten-cent article.

As no publisher can control the output of good or bad music he would always have to compete against others

willing to offer music just as good, if not better, at the old figure, and no one would be likely to make a practice of paying twenty cents for a copy when two others could be secured for the same price. The public does this very thing today for the exceptional song, but the exception is not likely to become the rule.

Of course, authors would offer no objections to the raised prices, for they would derive some benefit, but in the long run they might not be any better off. Less music would be purchased at higher prices. For the present low rate the publishers have no one but themselves to blame. When songs were selling for twenty-five cents they were not satisfied and began a cut-rate system of competition.

Royalty is paid to writers on phonograph records and piano rolls. Some publishers pay a half-cent on each record, while others split a half cent between the writers.

There is such a thing as foreign royalty, but it has always been more or less of a joke to writers. One hears from time to time that such and such a song is "all the rage" in Europe, but when the foreign statement is received the writers have a difficult task trying to understand why such a small sum is allowed for the foreign sales. Many come to the conclusion that a few pirates have been at work on the other side disposing of uncopyrighted editions.

Royalty statements are issued twice a year, in January and July. It is unwise to plan what you will do with your royalty until after you have seen your check.

CHAPTER XIX

SCARCITY OF WOMEN SONG WRITERS

Women writers of song-hits are scarce because they rarely play the game according to the rules. There are thousands of women in the country who are making some efforts to become popular song writers, and thousands who already have had one or more songs published, but the majority of the women who have had compositions printed are those who have paid for the printing, as the result of giving credence to the lying literature of some song shark—of which more in a later chapter.

The fact that several women have won success in the popular field should stand out as a beacon of hope for others. Hundreds of women throughout the country have attained local popularity, which is something of an accomplishment in itself.

Among the best-known national-hit writers are: Anita Owen, Beth Slater Whitson, Mabel McKinley, Clare Kummer, Kate Vaughan, and Grace LeBoy. During the past two years a number of other young women have been making some real progress and will, in all likelihood, land their proportion of big hits sooner or later.

The chief drawback with the woman song writer is that she does not look upon the writing of songs as something that demands careful thought and diligent application. Many of them view it in the light of a means for obtaining pin money, and are deluded with the idea that they can

dash off a lyric during a few leisure moments. Few of them ever endeavor to learn just how well qualified they are to write, or just what style of song they can do best, and as a result of this haphazard and indifferent method they never accomplish anything. During an interview, Anita Owen, who is the most consistent writer of the feminine sex, said:

"I began to write songs because I liked the work—for the sheer love of it. Then when I found that others were willing to pay me for what I wrote I saw a considerable source of revenue and increased my output. But later on I discovered that my original style of songs did not offer a wide market, so I just sat down and viewed the entire matter in a cold, commercial manner."

"Do you mean that you had then decided to take up writing for a livelihood?" she was asked.

"Yes; but I knew that I could not write every style of popular song, or at least I felt that way. Having been educated in a convent, as well as having been taught nothing but classical music, I had no love for ragtime, so I knew I could never put my heart in that sort of music, much less in the sentiment that is invariably associated with it."

"What prompted you to devote your time to ballads?"

"Experience and observation had taught me that a simple, pretty melody wedded to a clean little love story always made a good impression on young women, so I decided to confine myself mostly to this type of song, and the size of my royalty checks, and the following I have won, have proved that my judgment was correct."

Miss Owen said that in writing her lyrics she pays very little attention to the physical description of her characters—she does not try to make a lyric resemble an essay on women's apparel. Her aim is to incorporate a story that will reach the heart, that will stir and thrill the emotions, rather than tell of the girl's pretty dress or the way she wears her hair. In this respect she follows in the footsteps of masculine lyrists who have succeeded.

If other women aspiring to become song writers would cling to the story-element they would not find the road to success so rough. The average beginner, however, never gives a thought to the story and crams her lines with bits of personal description, atmosphere, and environment. And so long as she will persist in refusing to take the business seriously, which includes the study and analysis of the work of others who have won success, just so long will she remain in obscurity. The field will always be open to her, unless she persists in closing it to herself.

Perhaps women are better qualified to write high-class ballads, which demand less of the concrete story and allow for a wider play of description and figurative language. Most aspirants for song honors appear to prefer the use of figures of speech to plain statements. They fail to grasp a man's point of view in a love story, or if they do, they do not convey the emotional impression that a masculine writer does. In one respect a man has an advantage—he has been in the habit of telling love tales, or he has dreamed a thousand love stories he would like to whisper in some girl's ear, which in itself is the best kind of practice.

In fiction and in plays, however, women writers over-

come this handicap, so there is no reason why they should not be capable of duplicating the feat in popular-song lyrics. A woman interested in writing lyrics merely for her own personal pleasure may follow the dictates of her ideals, but the woman who desires to adopt *popular* song writing as a source of revenue must make her work conform to the demands of the markets.

The masculine lyrist who turns to the business hopes in time to become an actual part of it, or at least he who adopts it as a vocation does, and when he begins to rub elbows with others in the profession he gradually acquires experience and information that make his services more valuable to a publisher than are those of a woman who, through modesty or timidity, feels that she has to keep aloof. But in spite of the fact that conditions may force her to remain apart from the publishing centers and their turmoil, she can find ready markets, provided she is able to offer what publishers need. A publisher cannot continue in business unless he is able to furnish the public with what it wants, and if a woman, whether she lives in New York or in Alaska, is capable of supplying the kind of material he needs, he will be only too willing to do business with her.

Another drawback with the woman anxious to write popular lyrics is that her mind has never been trained to think the way the masses do, and try as she may she could never lower her mode of expression to correspond to that of the lovers of popular sheet-music. On the other hand, the exceptionally clever, highly educated woman should be able to gauge the scope of popular sentiment and shape

words and expression to meet it if she sets about doing it seriously. From time to time men have had to adopt this method for the sake of gathering in the golden coins. Anita Owen had to do it before she was able to make any real progress as a popular-song writer, and if she could "turn the trick," there is no reason why others should not be able to do likewise. Whether or not one cares to lower her thought and her artistic ideals from a monetary motive is a question that the hesitating and ambitious woman must answer for herself. It is enough to say that not all women popular-song writers have found it necessary to do so.

CHAPTER XX

THE STAFF WRITER AND THE FREE LANCE

1. The Staff Writer

Once upon a time practically all of the popular publishers depended upon outside writers for their material, but the staff writer is now a recognized and important element in the business.

The staff writer naturally evolved from the pianist who was capable of writing tuneful melodies. The most natural thing for a composer-pianist to do was to turn his songs over to his employer, where he would be in a position to see that his work received proper attention. When a clever piano player proved to be a hit writer, the publisher, to prevent the man from slipping from his grasp, and thereby losing a man that served him in two capacities, "signed him up" for a certain length of time.

Seeing the value of having the exclusive rights of a composer's work led the publisher to believe that it would be a wise plan to tie up one or more clever lyrists. In this way he would be assured of a certain amount of good material every season. Besides, he would have men known to the vaudeville world who would try to interest performers in their songs. Thus the staff writer covers both sides of the work of song writing.

To the new man the staff writer looks like a solid wall closing every entrance that leads to recognition in song

writing. The staff writers of today thought the same when they were fighting for a start, but somewhere in their brains they had an idea that if they kept pounding long and hard enough on the wall they would eventually force an opening. And they did. The staff writer remains a staff writer just so long as the outsider cannot excell his work. Men under contract are expensive, and publishers will not continue to keep them tied up unless they can "make good." Here lies one of the chances for the outsider, but not the only one, as we have already shown.

The ideal staff writer is a man like Percy Wenrich, who works most of the time in vaudeville singing his own compositions, as well as others published by the house with which he is at the time connected. He not only writes and sings his own songs, but he tries to interest other performers in them, whom he meets on the various programs. While he is on the road he may also pay a visit to the jobbers. One can readily see how much more valuable he is to a publisher than a free lance whose interest does not extend beyond the writing of songs and the collecting of royalties. However, neither Percy Wenrich, who is the composer of "Moonlight Bay" and "The Tulip and the Rose," among other hits, nor any other writer, will live forever—which offers some more hope for the man on the outside who is looking in wistfully.

Harry Von Tilzer, when queried about staff writers, replied:

"I always keep one or two lyrists on my staff. In the first place, I need some one that can work in harmony with me—a man who will come to know the kind of songs that

appeal to me. You know, collaborators have to work together some time before they can do their best work. And so long as a man can 'deliver the goods' I keep him. When he fails I look on the outside for another, and if I come across a new man with the ability to add freshness to phrasing, or with new song ideas, you can rest assured that I will not let him get away from me without making an effort to tie up his work. It matters little to me where he happened to be born or where he lives. Such a man is valuable to my business, and it is my business to make it profitable for him to write for me."

The staff writer can keep you from succeeding with a given publisher, even if you have ability and confidence in yourself. You may knock at a publisher's door today and find that his staff keeps him well supplied, but this is no reason why you should not try again later on. The staff writer does stand in the way of the outside writer, but he is not an insuperable obstacle to the man or the woman of talent, tact and push. If Harry Von Tilzer had given up in despair after he had been knocking in vain two years for entrance he never would have been known.

2. Free Lancing

Free lancing in the popular-song business is uncertain, just as it is in any field of writing, and no tyro should desert a steady position in order to become a free lance. If you desire to write for the open market wait until you have at least obtained some sort of reputation before you look to song writing as a means of livelihood. At present the

recognized writers prefer to sign a contract with some firm that will allow a drawing account, and those among the known writers who are not consistent enough in their work to secure a drawing account have to depend upon free lancing to a certain extent, or they give some publisher the preference in seeing their new songs, with the understanding that the publisher will hand over a stipulated advance on every song that he accepts.

The market for the free lance is not as brisk among the big firms as it used to be in "the good old days gone by," but to offset this undesirable change, so far as the free lance is concerned, dozens of small publishers willing to talk business with the newcomer have come into the field; and the veteran is not averse to doing business with the small publisher, provided the latter has real money to pay for material.

When the big publishers looked to outsiders for most of their songs, a clever free lance could sell or place one or more songs a week, and as it was customary for the publishers to advance sums ranging from twenty-five to several hundred dollars on each promising song, the free lance did not have much difficulty in keeping the landlord in good humor. New publishers starting in the business at that time looked to the free lance with a reputation, for several good numbers, and the "free" man sold him anything and everything that he could dig up. Sometimes what the "wise" firms had rejected as worthless a new man would take and turn into a hit.

One free lance would sell everything outright, while another would keep a few songs on royalty and dispose of

the rest of his product on an outright basis. In those days it was possible for a writer to collect royalty from several houses, and it was nothing uncommon for a writer to be working for one firm and placing some of his songs with another.

For a long time one concern made a practice of supplying sheet-music to a number of Sunday newspapers. Ordinary songs were used, and the free lances found this market very convenient. Prices ranged from twenty-five to seventy-five dollars for a song, and a writer with a fair reputation found little difficulty in selling at least one song a month. A few writers, after having wound their way into the good graces of the manager, were fortunate enough to find a market in the paper for two and three numbers every month. About the same time several musical magazines began to be published in various parts of the country, and these afforded additional opportunities for the disposal of mediocre songs—of which condition the free lances took advantage.

Free lances unable to sell to certain select houses, often sold material to staff men—that is, the real writer, for a monetary consideration, renounced all claim and credit to the work. Another form of revenue was the rewriting of lyrics purchased from new writers, or from old writers who were unable to give a lyric the necessary polish.

The free lance often picked up neat little sums by writing special songs and parodies for comedians, and the free lance composer did likewise by taking down melodies, making piano arrangements, or writing melodies to order or the occasional lyric writer. Some of the free lance

composers worked as pianists for publishing houses or for cabarets, known in those days as concert halls. Thus there were numerous ways for the lyric writer and the composer to pick up money, but these methods became known only when one was in the actual grind.

Today a free lance may earn money from special writing, parodies and revising, but to do so he has to be known and be in touch with the music business and the theatrical world. In fact, to make himself part of the music business should be the ultimate aim of every person who expects to obtain any real revenue from song writing.

While approximately all of the successful writers make their headquarters in New York or Chicago, only a small percentage of them were born in either of these large cities. A person living in New York or Chicago has an advantage over one residing in some distant city or town, for the city man has an opportunity to come in personal touch with publishers and performers. The other, however, should not permit distance to discourage him—he has the mails, and if he can turn out the kind of songs that the publishers think will be hits, he will secure a hearing just as quickly as his cosmopolitan cousin.

The out-of-town aspirant will do well to study the various catalogs of popular publishers before trying to sell to them, as well as keep an eye on the activities of all publishers, large and small. This can be accomplished by reading some trade journal like *The New York Clipper*, which has an excellent song column conducted by Jack Edwards. The advertisements in a paper like the *Clipper* will often furnish clues to possible markets for song mate-

rial, as well as for other forms of writing suitable for vaudeville.

A new writer should not be discouraged by a few rejections, for, in spite of the staff system in vogue with some houses, there are still opportunities open to the man who can write the proper kind of songs. Like others who have preceded you in the game, you will have to continue to write and submit until some publisher sees merit and commercial value in your offerings; and while working towards the big hits, do not overlook the little things that may lead you to the bigger ones. Obstacles confront every one starting out in life, but they gradually withdraw and finally disappear when opposed by quality and determination.

A free lance may add to his bank account by shaping some of his sentiment to the needs of the popular magazines. Very often a lyrist discovers an idea that does not appear to be suitable for a song, or it may be untimely, but which by proper treatment would be available as a filler for a magazine page.

The manufacturers of colored post cards offer another market for the man or woman clever enough to turn out bits of rhymed sentiment. The rate of payment for this sort of material is one or two dollars for each verse of four lines. Magazines like *The Writer's Monthly* often publish lists of markets for such offerings.

CHAPTER XXI

POPULAR SONG PUBLISHERS

To one unacquainted with the intricacies of the music business, a publisher's life appears to be a bed of roses, and that all he has to do is to issue a new song, unload it on the public, and then collect a small fortune, pausing long enough in his counting to dribble out a few dollars to the writers. Now the actual truth is that a publisher's business life is a source of constant worry. There is nothing permanent about his business, for he has to create a new and individual demand for each new thing he prints. The buyer of his hit today may not purchase another of his songs for months or years. In other lines of business a man may build up a reputation for his goods, and the public will come to know him and patronize him year in and year out. In a large sense this is not true of the publisher of the popular song, for only a few of those who buy his songs ever look at the publisher's imprint.

Whether a publisher is making money or not he has to continue to put out songs, and under present conditions he is compelled to pay performers and "pluggers" to sing the songs if he wishes to make sure that they get before the public. Many of the songs he issues turn out to be costly failures, and if hits do not develop at frequent intervals he has no alternative but to close his doors. Or if he is able to remain in business he has to keep abreast of the general competition in advertising his wares, as well

as maintain an expensive staff for the accommodation of performers, no matter whether this season's songs are successes or failures.

By this time we have seen that a publisher cannot tell with certainty when he has a hit. In former years he accepted and published what appealed to him personally, backed by the opinion of one or two performers, but today the wise publisher sweeps aside his own opinion as being far from final and tries to get a line on a song by having it introduced in several places of amusement. If the reports are favorable, he pushes with all his power; and if not, he shelves it for another. But even after what appears to be a fair and satisfactory tryout a song will sometimes turn out to be a dead failure.

But publishers must form opinions as to what will sell long before the songs can thus be tried out, and naturally most of them think they know what the public will buy. As a matter of fact, few of them really do. One will reject a song as worthless which will be turned into a big hit by one of his competitors. Or another may turn away a first-class ballad, knowing that he has not the funds necessary to "make" the song—he may be in need of some little shoo-fly number to bring him performers and start his catalog to move. Or again a publisher's mind may be naturally of a sordid nature and unable to see the possibilities in a good ballad. Something of a suggestive nature would make a stronger impression on him than a dozen clean songs. And so it goes.

The consistent producers of hits are men who eliminate personal likes and dislikes and judge a song as a tea

merchant would value a chest of tea for marketing purposes. They analyze a popular song from every possible angle, and if it shapes up like something for which there is a profitable market they bring it out. The Feist-Bitner combination, Harry Von Tilzer, Pat Howley, Will Von Tilzer, and the Marks-Stern duo are about the keenest judges of popular songs in the country today.

When you are obsessed with the idea that publishers have formed a conspiracy to keep you from getting a start, try to put yourself in a publisher's position. Mr. Bump, let us suppose, has not had a hit in nine or ten months. During all this time, however, he has had to pay rent, salaries, and singers. At the approach of fall his hopes rise, and he is on the lookout for a hit that will retrieve his past losses and bring in some profit. He knows that to produce that hit, even after he has secured a promising number, he will have to invest from one to twenty thousand dollars, and you can rest assured that before he commences to loosen the purse strings he will do a great deal of thinking. His staff has turned in several songs, but before a selection has been made some outsider sends in what appears to have all the earmarks of a hit, and is far superior to anything furnished by the staff. Can you picture that impersonal and unsentimental publisher allowing the new man's song to slip from his grasp? Not likely; but the trouble is that the newcomer very rarely gives a publisher such a pleasant surprise. Now bear in mind that the publisher is in the business to make money, and the new writer is anxious to secure a start. Do you suppose that if the publisher were to offer the unknown a

hundred dollars for his song the latter would reject it? And would not the publisher be much better off in the long run by making the purchase?

"But," argues the skeptic, "would not the staff refuse to do justice to the song of a beginner in the matter of exploitation?"

With some shyster concern this would be possible, and even probable, but the sagacious publisher of today is fully aware of such a possibility and would see that the song received its just due. In nine cases out of ten a staff lyrist or composer would have to be called in to put the song in proper shape, and would alter both lyric or melody to such an extent that he would be entitled to part credit for the work, and in this manner the song eventually would become a house production.

All songs put out by big houses are not expected to be hits. Some publishers make a practice of issuing "counter" songs, which are accorded no special attention, but are bought up by the jobbers along with the hits. Usually they are merely pretty little love songs.

The small publisher struggles along the best he can, always buoyed with the hope that he will sooner or later land a hit. He depends upon one or two "pluggers" to exploit his songs in the publishing center and in adjacent towns, and looks for outside publicity through "small time" performers who are unable to force the big publishers to pay for their services. The small publisher's "plugger" acts as pianist during the day, and often fills in as an arranger. On certain days of the week the small publisher may have a demonstration at one of the big

department stores. If enough out-of-town singers use his songs he will also receive orders from the jobbers, but the jobbers keep just enough of his stock—those songs which they see advertised—to meet a few possible calls, in addition to what they take to fill orders. In addition to all this, the small publishers in small cities follow their own methods in disposing of their wares.

A publisher may reject your song without giving any reason. The song may be meritorious, and one that appeals to him, but he may be unable to do anything with it, having already spent several thousand dollars on something else that looks like a hit. You could not expect him to quit working on the other number in order to take up yours, and he may feel that when he would be ready to give it proper attention the song would have lost most of its commercial value for him. If you have a song that carries your faith do not stop offering it until you have submitted it to every reliable publisher in the country.

CHAPTER XXII

THE EVOLUTION OF A MANUSCRIPT

For the sake of illustrating, let us imagine a concrete instance of how a song is published.

Your song reaches a publisher by the first post. During the reading of his mail he comes to the envelope that carries your hopes. He glances at the title. If the title you selected happens to be a trite or an "impossible" one, he puts the song aside without another thought for it, as he can almost sense the kind of story that goes with it. However, if your title impresses him in any way he will lay it aside for future consideration, and when he is not rushed with business he will pick it up and run his eye over the chorus. Should your chorus offer possibilities he will read the entire lyric carefully.

Having become interested in the lyric he will begin to wonder what sort of melody goes with it, and it is very likely that he will call in a pianist to play it, or he may postpone the playing until later in the day. In any case you may rest assured that he will not return the song until he has heard it played and has obtained the opinion of some one else.

Perhaps you may have written a good lyric to a poor melody. In this case the publisher will write and try to make arrangements to have one of his staff composers write a new melody, or he may offer to buy the song out-

right, as the outright plan will permit him to alter the lyric and melody to suit himself.

Once the song has been accepted and completed, it will be sent to the music engraver for "punch" plates to be made—that is, first proof sheets, with white notes against a green background—will be returned to the arranger for corrections. If no second proofs are necessary, several thousand professional copies will be run off for the use of performers. Sometimes a publisher has "lead sheets" printed for the benefit of well-known performers who wish to use it before it falls into the hands of the rank and file.

The next step is to summon a title artist, who reads the story in the lyric and then sets out to draw a picture that will illustrate the title idea. A semi-high-class ballad does not require a picture title, but the title page is made of artistic scroll work, or just plain wording artistically arranged. The publisher or author may offer suggestions as to the drawing, or the artist may be allowed to use his own judgment.

As soon as the artist has made a drawing that meets the publisher's approval, the drawing is sent to the engraver for a plate, and when the plate is completed, it is sent to the music printer and the work of turning out the regular copies begins.

Then the "pluggers" start out to hammer the song into the ears of the public. The song is next listed with the jobbers, the department stores, and the five- and ten-cent syndicates. Now, every song published does not find its way to the jobbers or the music counters, for neither the jobbers nor the retail stores will handle the song unless

they feel confident that the publisher is in a position to give it proper publicity. Of course, it is assumed that the song in question is in the hands of a large firm like Feist, Stern, or Harry Von Tilzer. Such being the case, the jobbers and the retail men would offer no objections to listing the number.

In the meantime copies would have been sent to the makers of musical instruments. Phonograph singers would be called in; and in fact, every one in a position to do the song any good would be brought into play. If the song should be one that looks like a hit the publisher would send copies to his staff of paid performers asking them to "put it on" as soon as possible.

"Scare head" advertisements would appear in *The Clipper* and other theatrical papers notifying the vaudeville world that the greatest song written in a century had just been released, and that everybody who considers himself anybody, and desires to use a real, live "number," should write in for a copy. Besides, vocal orchestrations may be printed in one or several keys, all depending upon the publisher's faith and the size of his bank balance. At this stage of the game you may have occasion to visit a music store to be greeted by your name on a title page of a coming hit. It may have undergone a number of changes since parting from you, and if it has, you will do well to study the changes that the publisher considered necessary for the success of your work.

CHAPTER XXIII

PUBLISHING YOUR OWN SONGS

Since publishing popular songs is a gamble, unless a person bent on bringing out his own compositions is in possession of a fair-sized bank account he should not attempt to compete against the big publishers. However, one may publish his own songs and derive some profit by confining his efforts to local dealers. A year or two of this sort of experience will enable the beginner to judge as to the expediency of going after bigger game, which will entail the printing of professional copies, special and regular orchestrations, and the cost of advertising in theatrical magazines, as well as various other items of expense too numerous to be mentioned here.

The advice to be offered in this chapter is based on the supposition that the person anxious to publish his own songs is a resident of a small city. Your music dealer has to pay seven and eight cents a copy for popular sheet music that sells for ten, and if you can offer him songs equally as meritorious at the same or a slighter lower price you should have little difficulty in doing business with him. A dealer can sell a good song regardless of the author's or the publisher's name, provided he takes the trouble to bring it to the attention of prospective customers. As there are not enough real hits to keep him supplied with a sufficient variety for his needs he has to purchase ordinary

songs to fill up his counter, and very often he has to force some of lesser merit upon his customers.

Many of his patrons after having purchased all the hits on the market ask him if he has any other good songs, and there is no reason why he should not be willing to recommend your song to them, provided the work has merit, in both lyric and melody. He is in business to make money, and your chances of doing business with him depend upon the concession in price that you are willing to make. If he were handling four songs of yours he could very easily dispose of one hundred copies a month, and very likely two hundred—assuming always the matter of merit.

Before having your songs printed you would do well to "sound" the dealers in other towns and cities within a radius of say fifty miles. Tell them of your plans and have your manuscripts played over for them. In this way you will find out just what appeals to the majority, which is wiser than to have the songs printed and then discover that the dealers do not care for them. Bear in mind that the dealer will be guided by the likes and dislikes of his customers. If your finances permit you to give the dealers demonstrations, you might increase sales by this plan. It has been put into practice by scores of small publishers and has proved to be a profitable one.

Do not try to compete with the variety of songs brought out by the large publishers. Confine your wares to semi-high-class ballads, rustic songs, march ballads, and juvenile-story songs. Your compositions will have to sell on their merit, and unless they are really meritorious the

dealer will not relish the idea of recommending them to his customers.

You will have to exercise care in selecting a title page. In this respect you will have to keep up with the pace set by the leaders, for few music buyers care to carry home songs adorned with cheap-looking title pages. The cost of the drawing and plate will depend upon the number of colors you desire to use. A clever title-page artist can turn out an attractive title in one color. On semi-high-class ballads use nothing but a black and white title.

There are two ways of printing music, one is from metal plates, and the other from stone. The first way is the more expensive, as extra plates have to be made. Before your song reaches the printer, however, you will have to have "punch" plates made, which cost about one dollar and fifty cents each. The making of these plates need not concern you, for the music printer to whom you give your order for printing will attend to this phase of the work. In New York and Chicago, as well as in several other large cities, there are reliable music printers who will forward you estimates, and give you good work at reasonable rates. Names and addresses of a few will be found in the Appendix of this volume.

When you receive your regular copies send two, with one dollar, and a copyright application properly filled out, to the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C. Copyright blanks will be mailed to you if you will send a request for them to the Librarian of Congress. This copyright will protect your work in the United States. If you desire a foreign copyright you will have to make

arrangements with some agent who makes a specialty of this sort of work, but as it is very unlikely that any one will attempt to pirate your song, a foreign certificate will not be necessary.

Some dealers with whom you negotiate may ask you to leave music on consignment. Whether or not to do so is a matter that each one must settle for himself. If you were doing business with some of the department stores in New York you would have to agree to the consignment plan, otherwise you would not be permitted to put the music on their counters.

You may be able to create a demand for your songs by having them sung at the moving picture houses in the towns where your music is on sale. Mica slides containing the chorus could be used for the screen, in order to make the audience familiar with the chorus. At the local entertainments you could have a singer "put on" your songs.

The best time to bring out songs is in the autumn, when the young folks are beginning to plan indoor parties and receptions. In the summer, people do not care to remain in the house, and so long as they keep to the open, which they naturally do in pleasant weather, they will have no use for music.

By buying one of the theatrical papers, *The New York Clipper*, for instance, you can secure a list of the manufacturers of musical instruments. Send a regular copy of each of your numbers to every manufacturer. Those who put your music "on the instruments" will mail you a royalty contract and account to you every three or six months. Many of them will make records of songs regard-

less of the writer's or the publisher's reputation, provided the songs appeal to them as probable sellers.

The main thing for you to do is to keep alert and take advantage of every opportunity that presents itself. If you systematize your efforts and employ business-like methods you should be able to show a fair-sized profit at the end of each season.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SONG SHARK

Beware of the song shark! He is the man who advertises in magazines and newspapers for songs and song poems, and convinces unsophisticated persons that he can turn out a hit, provided they will pay the cost of the first edition—from thirty-five to seventy-five dollars. Just stop for a moment and consider what a genius he must be! A real publisher, one who is recognized by the profession and the trade, invests more than seventy-five dollars for a single advertisement in one of the theatrical papers. Imagine any reliable music publisher doing business on the former scale! Whenever a shark sends you a stack of alluring testimonials, usually written by his friends, refer to this chapter before parting with your hard-earned cash.

To get an idea of how much fifty dollars will accomplish you have but to examine the following data: A first-class piano copy costs five dollars; drawing for title page, from five to twenty dollars; title plate, twelve to fifty dollars, depending upon the number of colors to be used; inside plates, four and a half dollars; orchestra arrangement, ten dollars; one thousand regular copies, fifteen dollars; and copyright, one dollar.

The fifty dollars have been spent, and yet the song has not been properly issued, to say nothing of the exploiting. Vocal orchestrations have to be printed, as well as dance

music and professional copies. Special orchestrations have to be made for performers that are unable to sing the song in the original key. Advertisements have to be carried in the trade papers for months, and these just "burn up" money. Do you think that any shark will dive into his own pocket and put out the money? No sir! He will indeed print practically anything that you offer, and do likewise for any one else willing to pay for the publication of a very cheap edition. He may tell you that he will stand the expense of a second edition, but the second edition is purely mythical.

A real publisher has his hands full trying to make a hit from some one particular number, and to do so he is compelled to concentrate his attention on it for several months. On the other hand, the shark will promise fifty persons that he will turn out an equal number of hits in the same length of time, or if he does not actually promise, he will imply, and in your avidity to see your song in print and your bank account become plethoric you are likely to look upon his carefully worded phrasing as a guarantee. You never discover the difference until you hale him into court.

Genuine publishers, performers, and jobbers despise the shark and will have nothing to do with him. This fact, however, does not worry the shark, for he is not interested in having any business dealings with them. As a rule he asks fifteen cents a copy for his publications, fully aware of the fact that the popular hits retail for ten, and sometimes seven cents a copy.

Once you reply to a shark's advertisement he bombards

you with reading matter which tells how other unknown aspirants became wealthy and famous in a week or two. He neglects to state that these same writers did business with legitimate publishers who stood all the expense. He aims to give you the impression that all successful song writers began their careers by having their first compositions published at their own expense.

On receiving a lyric from you he will write to say that it is one of the best that has come to his attention in years, and that by not having it set to music by one of his gifted composers, and then published, you will lose a splendid opportunity to become wealthy and famous. If his first letter fails to "get you" he will start his follow-up system after you. He may say that he, owing to the unusual talent indicated by your work, is personally interested in seeing you secure a start, and to faciliate matters is willing to accept your payments in installments. Of course his sole object is to get the initial payment. Then you can do the worrying, for he will not do a thing until you do as he desires; and having paid the first ten dollars you will be inclined to see the affair to the end.

The butchering and printing of your song will cost him from ten to fifteen dollars. Should he relieve you of fifty he would make a profit of thirty-five. If all printers could do likewise they would be superlatively happy.

The shark agrees to render a royalty statement every six months, and the royalty contract stipulates that you are to receive seven cents on every copy sold by him. He may just as easily agree to pay fifty cents, for he seldom has any intention of trying to sell. And how he can pay

seven cents, when real publishers accept six and seven cents from jobbers for hits, is a mystery.

It is very doubtful if any shark ever tried to keep track of his client's work. Several sharks have been known to send a dollar in stamps at random, hoping that it will act as bait for someone else. With the dollar may go a note telling the author that he should try again, as his second attempt may prove a success.

From the profits of each song the shark has to allow a certain percentage for advertising and running expenses, but even after this has been deducted he has a tidy little sum for his own comforts. By printing a thousand songs a year he is enabled to enjoy an income of ten thousand dollars. Some sharks have cleaned up a hundred thousand dollars in a year.

Perhaps you wonder how the shark makes a profit from his business. In the first place, he has costs shaved to a minimum. He has no intention of exploiting your song, except listing it in a cheap catalog, or spending a few pennies advertising it along with a hundred other songs. Compare the five-dollar advertisement of a shark that carries from fifty to one hundred song titles with an advertisement of a real publisher. The shark's object is to make a profit from the printing of your song. He is able to do so by using stock plates—the same title plate does service for ten or twenty songs. The other man's lyric is obliterated on the music plates, a few changes made in the melody, and your lyric is substituted. If you look like "ready money" to him he may go to the expense of

having a new (?) melody ground out and a new set of plates made.

The shark agrees to send you two hundred and fifty copies, and this he does, in most cases, and he speciously informs you that by selling them for twenty-five cents each you will get your money back with a profit. But the only way you can sell his truck is by imposing upon the good nature of your friends. In the majority of cases you would be ashamed to admit that you were responsible for the song. The lyric seldom fits the melody, and the melody blended with—no, tacked to—your sentimental lyric may be more appropriate for an Irish comic song.

Once you see the copies he ships to your home, you are prompted to consult the law. Many do, and as a result some shark takes a trip to one of the federal prisons, but usually he has protected himself.

The shark will tell you that additional copies of your wonderful song will cost you fifteen cents each. He rarely carries any on hand, as he believes that you will never care to see another after having made the acquaintance of the first batch. If you should write in, however, you will receive silent treatment until you contract the writer's cramp and quit. Should you become insistent or threatening, you will be favored with a note informing you that the presses have broken down and that it will be months before you need to look for more copies. The truth is that your plates are being used for another man's song. The shark's knowledge of human nature teaches him that at the end of three months you will have no desire to see any more copies. And as a rule he does not miscalculate.

Some publishers will bring out songs at the author's expense, but they do it on a legitimate basis. Reliable publishers do not advertise for song poems, neither do they make any glowing promises. But even in cases of this kind, the publishers will not handle a song unless it comes up to the standard of the house.

CHAPTER XXV

COLORED SLIDES AND MOTION PICTURES

Colored slides are not much in evidence now. When they first made their appearance some fifteen or twenty years ago they were very popular and a publisher did not feel satisfied unless he was able to have his ballads illustrated. Slides were confined mostly to story-songs of a serious nature. Once in a while some publisher would have a comic song illustrated, or even a "coon" song, but the public did not display any keen relish for slides in connection with humor.

The use of slides often deceived a publisher into believing he had a hit. For instance, he would issue a war song that called for the picture of some gallant soldier waving Old Glory, and when the Stars and Stripes were flashed the audience would applaud vigourously; in fact, the average audience would respond to any display of the national banner regardless of the merit of the song. Nine times out of ten the people would forget the song as soon as it had been rendered, but the publisher would accept that one burst of enthusiasm as a seal of approval for the song. Soon, however, the publishers learned to estimate these demonstrations at their true value.

In the early days slides were an expensive item in the music business, for every performer of any note demanded them. A set of slides cost from five to ten dollars, to say nothing of the originals, and at least two hundred sets

were necessary to do any real good. According to one slide maker, F. A. Mills ordered something like eleven hundred sets for his "Red Wing." Real Indians were engaged from a show playing in New York at the time, and the slide man had his own troubles persuading the Indians to pose before the camera, as many of them were under the impression that every time the camera clicked it cut away one day from their lives. On another occasion where Indians were brought into play, the pretty young girl engaged to pose had to promise a young buck several kisses, in addition to the five dollars a day he was to receive, before he could be induced to sit and watch the camera man chop away many days from his precious life.

When motion pictures had taken a firm hold upon the public, several publishers had moving pictures made of the story in the song, but as the moving-picture song did not live up to expectations it was quietly eliminated as a medium of publicity. To add novelty to the moving-picture song, the writers posed to show just how they came to write the songs.

While a few of the big publishers still pay to have slides made, they do not plunge to the same extent as they did formerly, depending for publicity more on the inexpensive mica slide with a printed chorus. The publisher would rather have the audience join in the chorus once than look at the colored slides three times.

Small publishers do away with most of the expense of slide-making by purchasing a job lot of slides from performers or dealers, and then selecting scenes to fit the different lines in a song, and in this way a small publisher

may have twenty sets of slides, each set different, but each corresponding to the song.

One firm in New York has reduced slide-making to such a science that it can take a publisher's negatives and color them for fifteen cents each, which reduces the average set to about two dollars. Of course, in a case like this the publisher would have to stand the expense of having some one pose, as well as the cost of a photographer.

CHAPTER XXVI

HIGH-CLASS PUBLISHERS

The majority of high-class publishers are always willing to consider manuscripts from outsiders, but few care to look at incomplete songs. Furthermore, they are not, as a rule, interested in the individual "punch," but demand that the material possess real merit and charm and be suitable for persons of refinement and education. Poor English, faulty rhymes, irregular meters, and violations of musical technique, find little favor in their eyes.

The rate of payment for high-class material varies. The high-class publisher, however, is in a better position to give a larger royalty, as he does not have to shoulder the heavy expense entailed by popular exploitation; but a writer with a popular hit on royalty would receive more from one song than he could reasonably expect from the sales of a dozen high-class ballads, unless one of the high-class numbers happened to hit the fancy of the masses.

The writing of high-class songs is just as much of a business as that of writing popular songs, and no one not thoroughly familiar with high-grade songs should attempt to write them without first making a careful study of several catalogs. This will take time, and cost something in the end, but no normal-minded person should expect to acquire valuable knowledge without being willing to pay for it. Every artist has to do likewise.

You will find high-class publishers to be a courteous

set of men, willing to meet you half way; but like the popular publishers, they expect you to do business in a business-like manner. Should you show a spark of genius in your work, some of them will go out of their way to develop it. Among the high-class publishers one occasionally meets a philanthropist, who takes a keen delight in coaching budding talent. Perhaps you may be fortunate enough to meet one on your travels.

Several comments concerning high-class publishers, their methods, and the nature of their publications, were made in the chapter dealing with the various types of songs, so they need not be repeated here.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

GENERAL COMMENT

Before closing, the author wishes to touch upon several points that do not seem to belong to any one chapter, and yet they have a place in this book.

In the first place, it would have been impracticable to print all the lyrics necessary to illustrate each type of song, and some of the actual hits, even had they been included, would, owing to their poor quality, be of very little value to the newcomer. Several songs that were popular years ago have been used because they are good examples of their type, and show first-class handling on the part of the authors.

Any reader wishing to make a special study of lyrics can obtain a title catalog containing something like twenty thousand popular-song titles by sending ten cents in stamps to William W. Delaney, 117 Park Row, New York City. Mr. Delaney, who is the author of many popular songs, has been publishing song books with popular lyrics for the past twenty-five years. By consulting his title catalog you can find the number of the song book carrying the song lyric that you may require.

Now, if, after you have finished reading this book, you still believe that you are qualified to become a successful song writer, go to the work with a will. Take it seriously, but do not take yourself too seriously. Keep in mind the bromide—"What man has done, man can do." Be pre-

pared to fight for recognition; be willing to work for it, be determined to win it; and take along with you the best wishes of the author.

POPULAR-SONG PUBLISHERS

Abrahams, Maurice, Inc., 1570 Broadway, New York

Broadway Music Corporation, 145 W. 45th Street, New York

Buckeye Publishing Co., 997 E. Rich Street, Columbus, Ohio

Buck & Lowney, Holland Building, St. Louis, Mo.

Daly, Jos., 665 Washington Street, Boston, Mass.

Feist, Leo, Inc., 235 West 40th Street, New York

Granville, Bernard, 156 W. 45th Street, New York

Harris, Charles K., Columbia Theatre Building, New York

Haviland, F., Strand Building, New York

Howley, P. J., 146 West 45th Street, New York

Kendis, James, 145 West 45th Street, New York

Koch, G., 1431 Broadway, New York

McKinley Music Co., 80 Fifth Ave., New York

Morris, Joe. & Co., 145 West 45th Street, New York

Paull, E. T., 243 West 42nd Street, New York

Remick, Jerome, 221 West 46th Street, New York

Rossiter, Will, 136 Lake Street, Chicago

Rossiter Music Co., 306 W. Washington Street, Chicago

Root, E. T. & Sons, 1501 E. 55th Street, Chicago

Shapiro, Bernstein & Co., 224 West 47th Street, New York

Southern California Music Co., 332 S. Broadway, Los Angeles, Cal.

Stern, Jos. & Co., 102 West 38th Street, New York

Taylor, Tell, Grand Opera House, Chicago

Thompson & Co., Randolph Buildings, Chicago
Von Tilzer, Harry, 222 W. 46th Street, New York
Watterson, Berlin & Snyder, Strand Building, New York
Welsh & Wilsky Music Co., Philadelphia
Werblow & Fisher Co., Strand Theatre Building, New York
Weyman, H. A. & Son, 1010 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia
Witmark, M., & Son, 144 West 37th Street, New York
Woodward, Willis & Co., 1193 Broadway, New York

MUSIC PRINTERS

Harding, Frank, 222 East 22nd Street, New York
Lawson, F. J. Co., 350 West 38th Street, New York
Teller, Robt., Sons & Dorner, 311 West 43rd Street, New York
Van Dam, F., Music Co., 203 West 40th Street, New York

HIGH-CLASS SONG PUBLISHERS

Boosey & Co., 9 E. 17th Street, New York
Boston Music Co., 26 West Street, Boston, Mass.
Cadillac Music Co., 1416 Broadway, New York
Chappell & Co., 41 E. 34th Street, New York
Church, John, & Co., 39 West 32nd Street, New York
Church, Paxton, & Co., 1369 Broadway, New York
Ditson, C. H., & Co., 150 Tremont Street, Boston, Mass.
Fischer, Carl, 6 4th Avenue, New York
Fisher, J., & Bro., 7 Bible House, New York
Gordon, Hamilton, 141 West 36th Street, New York
Jacobs, Walter, Boston, Mass.

Maxwell, William, 96 Fifth Avenue, New York
Novello & Co., 21 E. 17th Street, New York
Presser Co., 1712 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia
Schirmer, G., 3 West 43rd Street, New York
Schmidt, Arthur P., 120 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass.
Schmitt, Paul, Nicolett and Eighth Sts., Minneapolis, Minn.
Schroeder, J. H., 10 East 16th Street, New York
White-Smith Music Co., 13 East 17th Street, New York
Witmark, M., & Son, 144 West 37th Street, New York
Wood Music Co., 246 Summer Street, Boston, Mass.

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